

Press release

Collectors Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa give eight outstanding paintings by Paul-Émile Borduas to MNBAQ

*A new exhibition in February will present
the works*

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Québec City, Wednesday, February 2, 2022 ✦ The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) is proud to accept eight major works by Québec artist Paul-Émile Borduas donated by leading British Columbia art-loving patrons and collectors Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa. This remarkable gesture follows the pledge of 39 works by artist Jean Paul Riopelle that Mr. Audain and Mrs. Karasawa have given from their family foundation to MNBAQ, accompanied by \$10 million to build Espace Riopelle, which will be inaugurated in 2025 in conjunction with the celebrations marking the centenary of the artist's birth.

The eight paintings by Borduas, mainly works from the 1950s, are valued at nearly \$9 million. Not only do they represent one of the biggest donations to MNBAQ but are of inestimable artistic value. "The generosity that Mr. Audain and Mrs. Karasawa are displaying is exemplary and driven by passion and unprecedented respect for the artist's work.

Their donation is not only repatriating to Québec iconic works by an artist who is an integral part of the history of Québec art but is also contributing to reviving our collective memory of a decisive period of our province. These exceptional collectors deserve our full recognition and deep appreciation,” Jean-Luc Murray, Director General of the MNBAQ, noted enthusiastically.



Michael Audain has expressed the wish that Québec celebrate Borduas’s memory and his contribution to Québec’s and Canada’s cultural heritage. “My wife and I have long cherished Borduas’s late paintings as the work of a great master and visionary. Through this gift, Yoshi and I wish to highlight the artist’s boldness, courage and uncompromising quest for artistic freedom. His painting was both innovative and captivating. But beyond that, we believe that through his teaching at École du meuble de Montréal, Borduas stimulated a whole generation of young men and women to throw off the shackles of dead-end artistic practices to embrace the right to cultural freedom. Although we will miss the works in our home, we are delighted to return a significant body of Borduas’s works to his native Québec.”



In the spirit of sharing, the public will be able to admire Borduas’s masterpieces starting **February 24, 2022**. They will be the focus of a new exhibition presented at MNBAQ, *Latent Energies. Paul-Émile Borduas in the Present. The Donation of Michael J. Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa*.

Latent Energies or the power of Borduas’s work in dialogue with the work of contemporary artists

What lies in store at *Latent Energies. Paul-Émile Borduas in the Present. The Donation of Michael J. Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa*? At first sight, it hinges on the outstanding donation of paintings by Paul-Émile Borduas to MNBAQ, which will engage into a dialogue with the works of contemporary artists **Dominique Blain, Michel Campeau, Nadia Myre, Alain Paiement, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Michaëlle Sergile**.

The first part of the title *Latent Energies* refers to the energies that exist without being apparent, changes in the state of matter, and the numerous polarities that Paul-Émile Borduas’s creation and thought express. *Latent Energies* focuses successively on matter, the body and the spirit, between Self and the Other, in light and shadow, in time and space, and in trauma

and resilience, all of which are polarities that are evidence of the complexity of human nature.

From the time of Borduas to the present, a number of artists have anchored their aesthetic research in a territory and a geography that harbour these incomparable forces, as much as in the emotional, identity-generating, and political bonds that shape humankind and its experience of the world. The works from the donation will engage into a dialogue with several recent acquisitions from the MNBAQ's Québec collection, since Borduas's output continues to question us about existence, creation, commitment, and diversity.

Why are the eight works by Borduas so important?

Borduas's paintings from the generous donation by Mr. Audain and Mrs. Karasawa will delight visitors. *Grenouille sur fond bleu* (1944) is one of the rare works that Borduas produced in the winter of 1944 when he was working in Ozias Leduc's studio in Saint-Hilaire. *Arabesque* (1955) was produced at the end of the artist's sojourn in New York toward the end of his life and reveals the influence of American abstract expressionism. In the same spirit, *Graphisme* (1955) appears to be one of the last paintings that Borduas produced that year when he had just arrived in Paris. It displays the combined influences of Jackson Pollock and Georges Mathieu. *Modulation aux points noirs* (1955) was produced in the weeks following the artist's arrival in Paris in 1955. Borduas appears to have initiated in the painting his "simplifying leap" that led to the major compositions in black and white the following year. *Figures schématiques* (1956), which was painted in August, is one of the biggest works that Borduas produced in his career, and it became an icon of the artist's Parisian output. *Chatterie* (1957), produced during a particularly fertile period for Borduas, has been described by historian, art critic, writer, and lecturer François-Marc Gagnon as an attempt to suggest movement and rhythm in space. *Sans titre* (1957) reveals a tendency toward highly controlled structuring of the pictorial surface, thus moving Borduas away both from his New York period and the influences of action painting and his automatiste period. Borduas's structuralist phase corresponds to a dialogue with the work of Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, one of the founders of abstract painting. Lastly, *Sans titre* (1959) appears to have been produced at one go, without preparation, but the powerful gesture that the painting represents is only an illusion. It was produced during a very prolific period that witnessed the creation of works that reflect at once

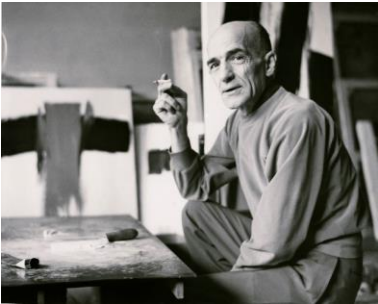


action painting and calligraphic works, no example of which was found in the MNBAQ's collections.

A significant enrichment of the MNBAQ's Québec collection

Until very recently, the MNBAQ's Québec collection included 21 works by Paul-Émile Borduas, one of the artists who has had the greatest impact on the development of modern art in Québec and, indeed, in Canada. In this context, the donation of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa will enrich the collection and fill gaps, foster the artist's integration into exhibitions devoted to the MNBAQ's collections, and further contribute to making known the work and thought of Borduas since the first group exhibition that the MNBAQ devoted to him in 1949.

Paul-Émile Borduas in a nutshell



Paul-Émile Borduas began his apprenticeship in 1921 in the studio of Ozias Leduc and assisted the master in numerous decoration projects in churches and chapels. In 1923, he registered at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal, where he achieved distinction by winning numerous awards. From 1928 to 1930, he pursued his training in France with Maurice Denis. This enabled him to initiate himself into more contemporary artistic expression, especially surrealism, which marked a turning point in his output. He read works by André Breton, who defined surrealism as pure psychic automatism, which had a significant impact on him.

Borduas became a professor at the École du meuble de Montréal in 1937. Two years later, with John Lyman and Robert Élie, he was a founding member of the Société d'art contemporain, established to promote abstract art in Canada. The influence exerted by his ideas on art broadened when a group of painters assembled around him. Jean-Paul Mousseau, Fernand Leduc, Pierre Gauvreau, Marcelle Ferron, Jean-Paul Riopelle, among others, formed with him the Automatistes. Driven by the desire to bolster the group's positions and philosophy, Borduas wrote and published in 1948 the manifesto *Refus global*, whose repercussions were such that he lost his teaching position at the École du meuble de Montréal.

He then devoted himself fully to his art, not without bitterly resenting his exclusion from cultural institutions. He left for New York in 1953, where he compared his approach with the most recent developments in abstract expressionism, especially the work of Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline. His work found unquestionable resonance there and he had several opportunities to exhibit his work, although it was in Paris that Borduas hoped to obtain the recognition of his peers. His settling in the French capital in 1955 was difficult and it was only in 1959 that the first exhibition of his work was held in the Galerie Saint-Germain. In 1962, two years after his death, a vast retrospective of his career was presented in Montréal, Québec City, Ottawa, and Toronto.

Michael Audain, in a nutshell

Michael Audain is Chairman of Polygon Homes Ltd., one of British Columbia's leading home builders. A fifth generation British Columbian, he was educated at the University of British Columbia and the London School of Economics.

An active supporter of the visual arts, Mr. Audain is Chair of the Audain Foundation, the Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation, and the Audain Art Museum Foundation. He was formerly Chair of the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vancouver Art Gallery Foundation.

Mr. Audain has been appointed to the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia. He has received honorary degrees from five universities, and the Queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilee Medals.

INFORMATION:

Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec

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Page 1 – Photo: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Figures schématiques*, 1956. Oil on canvas, 130.4 x 195.5 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa (2021.184) Photo: © MNBAQ, Denis Legendre

Page 2 – Photos from top to bottom: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Sans titre*, 1959. Oil on canvas, 73.2 x 60.4 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa (2021.187). Photo: © MNBAQ, Denis Legendre // Paul-Émile Borduas, *Sans titre*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa (2021.186) Photo: © MNBAQ, Denis Legendre

Page 3 – Photos from top to bottom: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Graphisme*, 1955. Oil on canvas, 41 x 33.2 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa (2021.183) Photo: © MNBAQ, Denis Legendre // Paul-Émile Borduas, *Chatterie*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 60.8 x 50 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa (2021.185) Photo: © MNBAQ, Denis Legendre // Paul-Émile Borduas, *Grenouille sur fond bleu*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 81.5 x 109.4 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa (2021.188) Photo: © MNBAQ, Denis Legendre

Page 4 – Janine Niepce for the ONF, *Borduas in his workshop, 15, rue Rousselet, Paris*, 1959. Gelatin silver print. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.