

Leila Zelli is the winner of the 2023 Prix Lynne-Cohen

*The MNBAQ is celebrating the new
generation of photographers and
contributing to raising its profile*

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Québec City, Wednesday, October 11, 2023 ▫ The Estate of Lynne Cohen, in collaboration with the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) and the Fondation du MNBAQ, is proud to announce that the 2023 Prix Lynne-Cohen has been awarded to **Leila Zelli**.

Presented every two years since 2017, the award seeks to support the practice of emerging Québec professional visual artists whose practices place particular emphasis on photography. The recipient will receive a \$10 000 cash award and her work will be highlighted through a video portrait produced by the MNBAQ, for dissemination on all its platforms.

An outstanding up-and-coming generation of artists

In addition to **Leila Zelli**, the members of the jury that met in September proposed **Simon Emond**, **Mallory Lowe Mpoka**, **Dayna Danger**, **Fatine-Violette Sabiri**, and **Alphya Joncas**. Discussions of the artists' practices were thorough and wide-ranging. Several jury members had an opportunity to discover especially striking works beyond the mandate assigned to them.

Andrew Lugg, who represents the Estate of Lynne Cohen, found all the practices noteworthy. With the fourth awarding of the prize, Mr. Lugg noted that he had been an observer on all the juries except the first one and that it had been a marvellous experience. "I have discovered the work of numerous young artists and invariably found the juries' presentations to be enlightening. I do not intervene on principle but have always been convinced by their final choice."

Moreover, Mr. Lugg had nothing but praise for the work of the finalists and the winner. "**Leila Zelli** deserves this prize. Her work is outstanding, and the jury rapidly concluded as much. I assume and hope that she will have a lengthy career, which has always been a significant consideration for Lynne Cohen and for me. Lynne knew to what extent the transition between the beginning and middle of a career is tricky for artists and she wanted to help to facilitate its development. When novice photographers sought her advice, she responded: "If you are an enthusiastic person, you must find a way to make it your life. That depends on each individual, but you must make a commitment."

On a more personal note, Mr. Lugg added that he was "encouraged by the finalists' work in recent and earlier presentations of the prize. This gives me hope and bolsters my appreciation of the MNBAQ's efforts and care with respect to this prize."

Members of the 2023 Prix Lynne-Cohen jury

A jury assembled and chaired by **Bernard Lamarche**, Curator of Contemporary Art (2000 to the present) at the MNBAQ, proposed the candidates. The jury comprised **eunice béliidor**, independent contemporary art curator and author, **Florence-Agathe Dubé Moreau**, independent contemporary art curator, author, and columnist, **Michel Hardy-Vallée**, guest researcher at the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies

in Canadian Art, and **Marie-Christiane Mathieu**, artist, and professor at the École des arts visuels de l'Université Laval.

Leila Zelli's talent impressed the jury members. In particular, they appreciated the sensitivity with which she reveals images, the refinement of her work, and the tension between what is visible and invisible in the political sphere. Her propensity for highlighting the fragility of the image also emerged as a quality of her work.

As jury member **Marie-Christiane Mathieu** observed: “Leila Zelli creates loop sequences using foreign reporting sites such as photographs of refugee camps, videos of fabric floating on gate posts, and bombing scenes. She often creates images by revealing so little that the observer must approach, crouch, climb, and read to fully grasp her intention. By maintaining the necessary distance, the photographer intelligently recontextualizes the breaks on the image through refined framing. Through the perspective of childhood and having fun, she provokes ambiguity with the state of the world that she presents, which embodies the particularity of her work.”



Leila Zelli's work focuses on elsewhere

The role of photography in Leila Zelli's work is often inferred. In the series *Les paysages sacrés* (2018), pairs of images assemble the dry petals of a Damask rose brought back by her mother from a trip to Iran, and the pages of her grandmother's old Koran, thus evoking the religious wars that threaten the ancient flower and missing loved ones. A filiation is also constructed there between generations of women.

The artist cannot return to Iran without risk but continues to denounce political social problems without overlooking poetry in the parallels that she draws between images, stories, and individuals. As the Galerie Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain, which represents the artist, has noted, “the results are visual and sound experiences that spark a moment of reflection on the state of the world, on our relationships with others, and the effective impact of our gestures on humanity.”

Elsewhere, ruins in her work skirt playgrounds, of which we only hear the sound. What is more, certain of the artist's videos are to be viewed through apertures, engaging the body so that it perceives the world as though



through walls riddled with bullet holes. One theme of her work is the absence of images and the loss of cultural, humanitarian, and personal heritage. The artist is particularly interested in the courage that women display in Iranian geopolitical realities.

Leila Zelli, in a nutshell



Born in Tehran (Iran), Leila Zelli lives and works in Montréal. She holds an MFA (2020) and a BFA (2016) in Visual and Media Arts from Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Zelli is interested in the relationship that we have with the ideas of “others” and “elsewhere” and more specifically within this geopolitical space often referred to by the questionable term “Middle East.” She creates in situ digital installations using existing images, videos and texts often found on the Internet. The resulting visual and sound experiences create an opportunity to reflect on the state of the world, the relationship with the Other and the actual effect of our actions on humanity. Since 2019 she has presented four solo exhibitions, and her work has appeared in 30 group exhibitions. Her works have been exhibited, by way of an example, at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Arts Of One World Collection), the Galerie Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain (2021 and 2023), the Bradley Ertaskiran gallery (2020), the Conseil des arts de Montréal (2019-2020), the Galerie de l’UQAM (2020, 2019, 2015), and the Foire en art actuel de Québec (2019). Her works are part of MAC Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts collection, The Musée Pointe-à-Callière, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec’s Prêt d’oeuvres d’art collection, the Musée d’art contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul collection and the collection of the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec. She is the 2021 laureate of the Claudine and Stephen Bronfman Fellowship in Contemporary Art. She is represented by Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain.

A video portrait of Leila Zelli

To enable the general public to discover Leila Zelli, the MNBAQ has produced a video brief at the Galerie Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain, which represents the artist in Montréal. The report, disseminated on the MNBAQ’s social networks in conjunction with the announcement of her award, is devoted to the 2023 winner of the Prix

Lynne-Cohen and highlights her artistic approach and presents a selection of works that illustrate her career in recent years.

To watch the report: https://youtu.be/Q_6Viudt7To

Lynne Cohen, impressive and inspiring in equal measure

Lynne Cohen is certainly one of the most respected contemporary photographers in Canada, whose renown extends to the United States and Europe. She was born in 1944 in Racine, Wisconsin. Following a year of study at the prestigious Slade School of Fine Art at University College London, in 1967 she obtained a bachelor's degree in science from the University of Wisconsin, and in 1969, a master's degree in visual arts from Eastern Michigan University. She settled in Canada in 1973, where she lived until her death in 2014. She first lived and worked in Ottawa for 30 years, where she taught at the University of Ottawa and assiduously pursued her artistic practice. In 2003 she moved to Montréal.

Throughout her rich, diverse career, Lynne Cohen devoted herself to the photography of interior spaces, which she captured as they appeared to her, without intervention or staging. The singularity of her work lies in the choice of spaces usually devoid of human presence and usually out of sight. Classrooms, science laboratories, thermal establishments and military facilities are all complex, inaccessible environments that she thus makes visible to measure their strangeness.

Lynne Cohen participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions the world over. Moreover, major retrospectives offered in-depth analyses of her artistic career, including the exhibition that the National Gallery of Canada organized in 2001, which toured Canada and France; and the recent exhibition organized by the Fundación MAPFRE in Madrid in 2014, presented at the Sala Vimcorsa in Córdoba and at the Sala Rekalde in Bilbao. Her work is found in nearly 50 public collections, including those of the National Gallery of Canada, the Australian Art Gallery, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. Lynne Cohen received a number of distinctions during her prolific career, including the Governor General's Award, the highest distinction granted for excellence in the visual arts and the media arts, and the first Scotiabank Photography

Award, which highlighted the artist's outstanding contribution both to the advancement of her discipline and to raising its profile.

About...

The MNBAQ

Situated in the heart of the majestic Battlefields Park in Québec City, the MNBAQ comprises four separate pavilions, i.e., the Gérard Morisset Pavilion (1933), the Charles Baillairgé Pavilion (1867), the Central Pavilion (1991), and the Pierre Lassonde Pavilion, a world-class signature building inaugurated in 2016, ideally situated on the Grande Allée, the main thoroughfare leading to Old Québec City. The museum complex houses over 42 000 works encompassing paintings, sculptures, drawings, photographs, prints, and decorative art and design objects, and its Inuit art collection. It offers a sweeping panorama of the history of Québec art from the 17th century to the present to fulfill its mission to make known, promote, and preserve Québec art from all periods. The future Riopelle Space of the MNBAQ will be built in 2026 on the current site of the Central Pavilion, between the Gérard Morisset Pavilion and the Charles Baillairgé Pavilion. The new building will in turn establish an unprecedented dialogue between art, architecture, and the park on a site to house Jean Paul Riopelle's works that reflects nature, his primary source of inspiration. The MNBAQ is plainly an ambitious museum that is also noteworthy for being a museum on a human scale.

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The Fondation du MNBAQ

The core mission of the Fondation du MNBAQ is to promote and support the MNBAQ's mandate by fostering the development of its collections, funding exhibitions, and access to educational programs. It also enables donors to tailor their contributions through the establishment of dedicated funds and offers to this end an adapted recognition plan.

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INFORMATION:

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Page 1 – Leila Zelli - Photo: MNBAQ, Marc-Antoine Blais

Page 3 – Photos: From top to bottom: Leila Zelli, *Révolution femme, vie, liberté, Iran*, 2022. Image found on Instagram. Photo: Screenshot of a video excerpt. Courtesy of the artist // Leila Zelli, *Pourquoi devrais-je m'arrêter?*, 2020-2021. Video. Collection of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Photo: Screenshot of a video excerpt. Courtesy of the artist // Leila Zelli, *Le chant des oiseaux*, 2019. Video. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Photo: Screenshot of a video excerpt. Courtesy of the artist.

Page 4 – Photos: From top to bottom: Leila Zelli, The *Un chant peut traverser l'océan* series. Ink drawing on paper. Photo: Courtesy of the artist. // Leila Zelli, *Terrain de jeux*, 2019. Screenshot of a video excerpt. Galerie de l'UQAM.