



A New Pavilion for Quebec and Canadian Art at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

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On 14 October 2011, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) opened its newest building to the public. Incorporating the neo-Romanesque Erskine and American Church, the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion of Quebec and Canadian Art adds over 2,000 square metres and six floors of exhibition space to the MMFA thereby producing, in the words of the museum's press release, "an emblematic and impressive 'lieu de mémoire'" for the city and the country. Clad in the same Vermont marble as the Hornstein and Desmarais Pavilions, the Bourgie Pavilion is a discrete addition to the MMFA's campus. Despite the shortage of available land behind the church, the new structure provides adequate space for the display of the 600 objects selected from the museum's collection of Quebec and Canadian art and an intimate concert hall been has fashioned out of the Erskine and American's original nave. The church has a long and intertwined history with the MMFA, its former congregation sharing class and ethnic identities with the founding figures of the Art Association of Montreal, the precursor to the MMFA. Indeed, those affinities are clearly evident on the top floor of the pavilion where unparalleled views up Mount Royal afford glimpses of the homes of many of the MMFA's current and past patrons. If the church provides a certain symbolic resonance to the new pavilion, the addition by Provencher Roy + Associés architects shapes the display in quite innovative ways. In what appears as a series of stacked boxes, the addition makes excellent use of a very small footprint, but in the process retools any previous image we might have of the conventional art gallery. Organized on a vertical rather than the traditional horizontal axis, the Bourgie Pavilion disrupts viewers' expectations by replacing spectatorial flow from room to room with self-contained galleries. Whereas in a more conventional room arrangement, the movement of viewers from one room to the next enables previews as well as backwards and sideways glances, at the MMFA, the viewer moves vertically from one 'box' to the next, with each floor a microcosm of a particular period

Detail, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, "Towards Modernism" gallery, Fall 2011.
(Photo: MMFA, Denis Farley)

in Canadian art. Such a spatial organization has placed certain constraints on the hanging of the MMFA's collection and has had important effects on the institution's presentation of the narrative of Quebec and Canadian art history. As the most recent re-presentation of Canadian art, the Bourgie Pavilion is an opportunity to examine approaches to display and the presentation of Canadian art history as these are inflected by a sense of historical and geographic place, institutional and private collecting histories, and the incorporation of Aboriginal expressive practices.¹

Overview of the Galleries

There are six floors of gallery space in the Bourgie Pavilion, with two main modes of access envisioned in the original plan: visitors would either enter through a new doorway on Sherbrooke Street, or from a passageway in the basement linking the Hornstein and Desmarais Pavilions. Since Fall 2012, however, all the MMFA's pavilions are accessible only through the Museum's main entrance in the Desmarais Pavilion, meaning that entry to the Bourgie Pavilion is through the lower galleries of the Hornstein building.² My analysis here reflects the original design. The main entrance on Sherbrooke takes visitors through what was once the basement of the Erskine and American church under the welcoming wings of David Altmejd's (b. 1974) sculpture *The Eye*, specially commissioned for the new pavilion.³ From this entrance, viewers are greeted by Marcelle Ferron's (1924–2001) untitled stained glass work from 1972, placed to echo the famed Tiffany windows preserved in the concert hall above. Once through the glass doors into the gallery area, visitors are immediately faced with Jean-Paul Riopelle's (1923–2002) large painting *Gravity* (1956), a work that also features prominently at the beginning of the catalogue produced to mark the launch of the new pavilion. Painted by one of the nation's foremost artists, and dating from his classic 'mosaic' period, *Gravity* signals the tenor of the MMFA's display and the location of its narrative of Canadian art history in Montreal. Indeed, as viewers move past *Gravity* toward the elevators and the rest of the collection, they are presented with labelling and wall text indicating that this floor is "The Age of the Manifesto," a phrase that will immediately resonate with visitors familiar with the history of Quebec art as pointing to the period that saw not only the publication of the *Refus global* (1948) – traditionally viewed as the call to arms that prompted the Quiet Revolution – but also produced the *Prisme d'yeux* (1948) and the *Manifeste des Plasticiens* (1955).

Despite the considerable impact of such an opening statement, the MMFA staff have a different idea of how the collection should be experienced and visitors are encouraged to walk past *Gravity* (and Robert Roussil's [b. 1925]



1 | Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, “*Takuminartut: Contemporary Inuit Art, 1948–Present*,” Fall 2011. (Photo: MMFA, Bernard Fougères)

large sculpture *The Family* [1949]), and take the elevator up to the fourth floor.⁴ This top floor showcases the museum’s Inuit collection in a display titled “*Takuminartut: Contemporary Inuit Art, 1948–Present*” (Fig. 1). Organized thematically, and with an emphasis on sculpture, the display is housed behind inclined white walls somewhat reminiscent of the snow walls traditionally used to shield igloos from Arctic winds. Although necessary to protect the prints and drawings from sunlight, the inclined walls and narrow entrance leading from the light-filled atrium to the dark interior space also recall the sense of mystery and exoticism that has historically accompanied exhibitions of so-called primitive art. This sentiment contradicts the claim in the introductory wall text that the curators are seeking to emphasize the contemporaneity of Inuit art both in terms of the genesis of its production as

art in the late 1940s, and as a reflection of the place of expressive culture in the everyday life of Inuit into the present.

The next floor in the pavilion's narrative is the "Founding Identities" gallery, presenting the museum's collection of works from the colonial period to 1880. Entering the space, the viewer is struck by the projection of a black and white video of a canoeist, paddling in the fog: this is the work *Portrait in Motion* (2001) by Algonquin artist Nadia Myre (b. 1974). Beyond the video, a trio of early Quebec religious sculptures dominates the first third of the gallery: a large sculpted crucifixion hangs from the ceiling while polychrome low relief statues of Saints Peter and Paul are placed on a bright blue wall. Moving further into the gallery, contemporary Cree artist Kent Monkman's (b. 1965) large painting *The King's Beavers* (2011) is on the viewer's right, its fantastical imagining of the politics of colonization as a battle over the economic and symbolic importance of the beaver creating a startling contrast with the colourful yet sombre religious sculptures that are its immediate neighbours. The rest of the gallery displays paintings and sculpture more conventionally associated with the colonial period: paintings of members of the Quebec bourgeoisie by Antoine Plamondon (1804–1895) and Théophile Hamel (1817–1870), anonymous *ex-votos*, reliquaries, historical paintings by Joseph Légaré (1795–1855), and François Malepart de Beaucourt's (1740–1794) portrait of Marie-Thérèse Zémire (1786). Formerly known as *Portrait of a Negro Slave* and now titled *Portrait of a Haitian Woman*, the work is on loan from the McCord Museum and hangs alongside the newly acquired portrait of an architect by the same artist.⁵ In a small room in the centre of the gallery, religious and secular silverware from the period is displayed to great effect, with attention being paid to present the work of both settler and aboriginal silversmiths from the period.

In the back third of the gallery, the curators have hung work from the English colonial period to the late nineteenth century, with landscapes by Allan Edson (1846–1888), Homer Watson (1855–1936), and Cornelius Krieghoff (1815–1872), along with two large portraits of members of the Salishan nation by Paul Kane (1810–1871). In this latter part of the "Founding Identities" floor, viewers also see a selection of objects from the Northwest Coast First Nations mostly collected by F. Cleveland Morgan (1881–1962) while he was the self-appointed curator of decorative arts and material culture at the Art Association of Montreal's museum.⁶ Acquired during a period when Aboriginal art from the Northwest Coast was considered the only accomplished form of primitive art in Canada, Morgan's purchases sit uneasily – both geographically and temporally – with the landscapes of Upper and Lower Canada on the walls. The mode of display contributes to this sense

of unease as fake trees placed at either end of the glass case cast overpowering shadows on the paintings behind.

The video by Myre and the painting by Monkman signal the intent of the “Founding Identities” display to disrupt the representations of Aboriginal peoples as a disappearing race of blood-thirsty warriors (Légaré), archaic primitives (Kane), or quaint characters inhabiting the landscape (Krieghoff). Specially commissioned for this space, Monkman’s depiction of settlers and Natives killing and cradling the beavers in equal measure unbalances preconceived notions of ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’ that viewers might hold. At the same time, the painting comments directly on New France’s colonial history making specific reference to events and figures and their iconic depictions. Meanwhile, Myre’s hauntingly beautiful video loop of an unidentifiable figure slowly paddling out of the fog and then back into it juxtaposes traditional practices with contemporary technology to underscore the continuity of Indigenous ways of life from the past into the present. A similar juxtaposition is attempted in the back part of the gallery but with less success: *Untitled (The Snake)* (1969), a large painting on leather by Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007), is hung next to the Kane portraits, while the Northwest Coast objects in the display case share space with a work from Brian Jungen’s (b. 1970) *Prototype for a New Understanding* series.⁷ The juxtaposition of Jungen’s sculpture with the work of such figures as Charles (1839–1920) and Isabella (1858–1926) Edenshaw, Bill Reid (1920–1998), and other artists of Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian descent works well within the contained frame of the display case. However, in a space largely devoted to artists from the Quebec and Ontario regions, the dominance of contemporary and historical First Nations art from the Northwest Coast art fails to achieve the consideration of artistic exchange among cultures that the curators likely intended.

The next floor down is “The Era of Annual Exhibitions” gallery, which features paintings and sculptures from 1880 to 1920 (Fig. 2). The centre of the gallery is taken up by a raised platform that presents some of the MMFA’s extensive holdings of bronze and plaster sculptures by Alfred Laliberté (1878–1953) and Louis-Philippe Hébert (1850–1917). With its bright white flooring and dark brown plinths, the platform provides a dramatic focus to the room as well as a singular vantage point from which to look at the paintings on the surrounding walls. On the left side of the gallery, paintings from the period are hung salon-style effectively illustrating the mode of museum display most common during the nineteenth century. At the far end of the room, two groupings of paintings by Ozias Leduc (1864–1955) and James Wilson Morrice (1865–1924) are on view while the final wall takes the display into



2 | Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, “The Era of Annual Exhibitions” gallery, Fall 2011. (Photo: MMFA, Marc Cramer)

the Impressionist period with works by Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Côté (1869–1937), Maurice Cullen (1866–1934), and Helen McNicoll (1879–1915). The startling thing on this floor, however, is the music. Consisting of period works by Canadian composers, the soundtrack is intended to evoke the mood of the Art Association of Montreal’s annual Spring exhibitions

of contemporary art and Fall presentations of highlights from members' collections during which a chamber orchestra often played. Although the continuous presence of the music can become distracting, the link to past traditions, as well as to the adjoining concert hall cannot be overlooked.

On the next floor, "Towards Modernism" offers what might be the pavilion's most interesting recasting of the narrative of Canadian art history in its presentation of works from the 1910s to the 1940s. Often considered the golden age of Canadian artistic practice and centering on the work of Tom Thomson (1877–1917) and the Group of Seven, the MMFA reorients the conventional presentation of this period to focus on the contributions of Montreal's artists by opening its display with specific reference to the Beaver Hall Group and continuing with the work of members of the Contemporary Arts Society. It is only at the far end of the gallery space that one encounters the work of Thomson and Lawren Harris (1885–1970), with other Group of Seven members represented in the second half of the gallery. The display area is bisected by a floating wall and, on the right side of the room, three bays provide a somewhat crowded space for the presentation of paintings and other objects. These are intimate spaces, and as a result, the scale of the works on display is quite small and the amount of room available to step back to see anything is not ideal. A feeling of claustrophobia is averted by the use of off-white and light ochre walls in all but the bays, which are painted a surprising black. A sizable display of works by Marc-Aurèle Fortin (1888–1970) is found at the back of this gallery, the legacy of the donation of the contents of the Musée Marc-Aurèle Fortin to the MMFA in 2007.

Going down another storey, the viewer returns to the intended main entrance of the Bourgie Pavilion on the ground floor and "The Age of the Manifesto" display (Fig. 3). This is the floor that celebrates the emergence of Quebec's modern art history: the moment when the province's francophone artists rebelled against the dogma-filled curriculum of Church-governed art schools and struck out on their own. The display is largely chronological in this gallery, starting with the artists associated with Alfred Pellon (1906–1988) and the *Prisme d'yeux*; next is a large section devoted to the paintings of Paul-Émile Borduas (1905–1960) alongside a selection of works by his fellow Automatistes; around the corner are large paintings from the 1950s by Claude Tousignant (b. 1932) and Guido Molinari (1933–2004), while a selection of works by the members of the first generation of Plasticiens occupies a small wall at the centre of the gallery.⁸ Sculptures are well represented in this gallery featuring smaller works by Charles Daudelin (1920–2001), Louis Archambault (1915–2003), Ulysse Comtois (1931–1999), and Anne Kahane (b. 1924). Meanwhile, a separate room dedicated to works from Jean-Paul Riopelle's most iconic period (1950–1975) underscores his national status.



3 | Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, “The Age of the Manifesto” gallery, Fall 2011. (Photo: MMFA, Denis Farley). Armand Vaillancourt, *Untitled*, 1958-60, © Armand Vaillancourt/SODRAC (2013) and Françoise Sullivan, *The Progress of Cruelty*, 1964, © Françoise Sullivan/SODRAC (2013)

“The Age of the Manifesto” is the largest of the galleries in the Bourgie pavilion. Located under what was originally the nave of the Erskine and American Church, the square footage is double that of any of the other galleries and as a result, there is a feeling of openness missing in the floors above. Encompassing only one province and a relatively short period of time, this gallery provided curators with more opportunity to examine the work of artists in detail, although some figures are treated in more depth than

others. The development of the work of Borduas is a case in point: the artist's oeuvre is presented from 1940 (the *Portrait de Mme Gagnon*) through the Automatiste period, ending with a strong showing of four works from the black and white period, as well as Borduas's "last" painting *Composition #69*, found on his easel upon his death in Paris in 1960. The focus on Borduas is not surprising. Montreal is where *Refus global* was written; understood to be a founding document of the Quiet Revolution, it was a strong imperative to Québécois to reject the Church's yoke and to see themselves as part of an international secularism that adhered to neither of the political ideologies that had dominated the preceding twenty years. If one of the slogans of the Quiet Revolution was "Québec sait faire," then this gallery is a clear indication of one field where Québécois achieved a high degree of innovation and success.

The last of the six galleries of the Bourgie Pavilion is in the basement. Titled "Expanding Fields," it is a long, corridor-like space that leads to the contemporary galleries in the basements of the Hornstein and Desmarais Pavilions. The space is high and wide enough to permit the display of large modernist works from the 1960s and 1970s; artists from Quebec and the rest of Canada include Jack Bush (1909–1977), Paterson Ewen (1925–2002), the stripe paintings of Tousignant and Molinari, Michael Snow (b. 1928), and Serge Tousignant (b. 1942). Spray paintings along with a large painted canoe bring Riopelle into this space as well, and tucked away next to the elevator the more observant viewer will find Alex Colville's (1920–2013) *Horse and Church* (1964). Startling by their absence from this gallery are works by women artists such as Joyce Wieland (1930–1988), Betty Goodwin (1923–2008), and Françoise Sullivan (b. 1925) whose equally large-scaled paintings would have provided an important counterpoint to the canonical figures on display.

Writing Canadian Art History at the MMFA

As the most recent reinstallation of Canadian art in a public art gallery, the MMFA's display raises a number of questions regarding mapping art history within the museological context: what role does geographic location play in narrating a national art history? To what extent do museums need to address (and potentially redress) their collecting histories in presenting a comprehensive history of Canadian art? And how can Canadian museums effectively incorporate the work of Indigenous artists in their permanent displays? Although emerging out of my consideration of the Bourgie Pavilion at the MMFA, such questions are equally pertinent to the consideration of other public art institutions across the country.

The sequence of displays firmly places the narrative as being *from* Montreal, whether through the lens of the MMFA's own history or through a focus on events that took place in the city. The first approach can be seen

to varying degrees in the didactic panels introducing the displays on the top four floors. Both the “*Takuminartut*” and the “Founding Identities” floors reference the collecting activities of the MMFA: the “*Takuminartut*” wall text identifies the donation of three pieces of Inuit sculpture in 1953 by Board chair and volunteer curator F. Cleveland Morgan as a milestone in the entry of Inuit art into Canadian art museums; and the panel introducing the “Founding Identities” display notes that nineteenth-century landscapes were the first *Canadian* works of art to be exhibited by the Art Association of Montreal and, as the catalogue notes, they were also the association’s earliest acquisitions. There is a clearer correlation between the growth of art in Canada and the MMFA’s historical role in that development in the “Annual Exhibitions” and “Towards Modernism” floors. In both cases, the wall text begins with the Art Association’s activities: the institution’s annual Spring exhibitions, inaugurated in 1880, enabled local artists, professional as well as amateur, to present their work to the public. Hung according to the display conventions of these annual exhibitions, the works featured in this room are presented within the context of the contemporary aesthetic ideals that originally framed them, rather than as examples of a conservative academicism as they might appear in the present. Meanwhile, the wall text accompanying “Towards Modernism” shifts the development of modern art in Canada from a narrative that begins with the Group of Seven to one that is oriented to the activities of the Montreal-based Beaver Hall Group and cites this as an example of the growing interest in modern art that accompanied the Art Association’s move to its new premises on Sherbrooke Street in 1912.

In seeking to locate its curatorial narrative explicitly from a Montreal vantage point, the MMFA challenges the dominant view of Canadian art history that continues to be based on a lineage that leads to and departs from a notion of landscape most commonly associated with the Group of Seven. This is particularly striking in the “Towards Modernism” floor (Fig. 4) where sculptures by Henri Hébert (1884–1950) and figurative paintings by Edwin Holgate (1892–1977), Prudence Heward (1896–1947), Randolph Hewton (1888–1960), and Liliás Torrance Newton (1896–1980) are the first works on display, while figures generally considered anchors of the period – Thomson and members of the Group of Seven – only appear at the furthest end of the space. This welcome change from the conventional narrative draws on extensive writing by Quebec art historians on the different reactions to modernism in Quebec and Ontario. As writers such as Esther Trépanier have noted, the celebrated unpeopled landscapes of the Group of Seven had little resonance in a province that was intent on underscoring the resilience of its people and its culture.⁹ Artists in Quebec depicted the inhabited landscape of Quebec, both rural and metropolitan, gradually shifting their explorations



4 | Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, “Towards Modernism” gallery, Fall 2011. (Photo: MMFA, Denis Farley)

from an atmospheric impressionism to a more modernist vocabulary to reflect both the growing urbanization of the province and the influence of international (read French) aesthetic practices. Such changes were part of a larger rejection of the regionalism that characterized Quebec at the turn of the twentieth century, when the Catholic Church dictated the means of cultural *survivance*. Through the 1920s and 1930s, however, new approaches to identity formation emerged more in line with the modern and with an internationalist outlook.

This view of the experience of modernity in Quebec is underscored in the selection of works on display in “Towards Modernism,” most visibly in Adrien Hébert’s (1890–1967) scenes of Montreal’s nightlife and its bustling port. City scenes by Fortin on this floor also add to the image of Quebec’s emergent modernity, and provide an important contrast to the images of

emptied wilderness in paintings by Thomson, Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), and Harris. But interestingly, it is the portraits and figurative works by artists associated with the Beaver Hall Group and the Contemporary Arts Society that predominate in “Towards Modernism.” Members of the Beaver Hall Group and central figures in the development of art in Montreal, artists such as Edwin Holgate and Lilius Torrance Newton are represented in much Canadian art history through their association with the Group of Seven and its successor the Canadian Group of Painters rather than as members of a bilingual group of painters and sculptors seeking to bring public attention to modern approaches to their craft. As both the wall text and the catalogue essay on the Beaver Hall artists attest, the existing literature has consistently misrepresented the group as predominantly female and anglophone, thereby diminishing the formative role of the interaction of these artists on the shape of art in Montreal for many years to come. In contrast, the MMFA’s presentation of the work of members of the Contemporary Arts Society emphasizes the work of its founder John Lyman (1886–1967) and other anglophone members but largely ignores the participation of numerous francophone artists, placing them instead on the floor below as part of a narrative of Quebec’s coming of age.

Despite this skew in the presentation of the Contemporary Arts Society, the orientation of this part of the Bourgie Pavilion’s display is a fascinating recasting of dominant Canadian art historiography: by centering much of its narrative around the history of the institution itself, the Art Association of Montreal’s role either as supporter of the emerging modernism of the Beaver Hall artists or as a perceived bastion of academicism against which Lyman’s Contemporary Arts Society could rail, works perfectly as an organizing principle for the display of a diverse grouping of artists. Institutional histories are often rendered invisible in permanent collection exhibitions, even though the narratives of these displays are contingent upon the collecting histories of these institutions. This is clearly illustrated in the “Founding Identities” floor where gaps in the MMFA’s collection of paintings and sculpture from Nouvelle France resulted in a concerted acquisition plan linked to the opening of the new pavilion to ensure that this important period was represented in the display. That such works were absent from the collection speaks volumes about the tastes of the original members of the Art Association of Montreal as well as attitudes towards Canadian art history by the MMFA’s subsequent directors and curators.¹⁰ Indeed, paintings from the French colonial period originally entered the collection through the auspices of F. Cleveland Morgan’s museum acquisitions committee whose purview encompassed decorative and traditional arts. “Traditional” in this instance included both the expressive production of Canada’s Indigenous peoples along with the

paintings and sculptural works of early French-Canadian artists, a collocation that underscores attitudes towards the French-Canadian past not only by the elite members of the Art Association of Montreal's board but by early chroniclers of Canada's art history.¹¹

Collecting taste also informs another striking aspect of the MMFA's new display: its integration of art by Aboriginal artists into the larger narrative of Canadian art history. This is not a new phenomenon in Canadian museums with the National Gallery launching its "Art of this Land" reinstallation of the Canadian Galleries in 2003, and the Art Gallery of Ontario entirely revising its Canadian display in 2008. These reinstallations used two distinct approaches to the incorporation of Aboriginal art into the display of Canadian art with different effects. The National Gallery's display is chronological and charts the development of artistic production in Canada from the pre-contact times to the 1970s. Objects of First Nations and Métis expressive culture are integrated into the display throughout, providing a juxtaposition of settler and Native art that illustrates the diversity of practices within given regions and periods across the country. The Art Gallery of Ontario, on the other hand, has chosen a more thematic approach and combines strategic presentations of contemporaneous objects (e.g. Haida model totem poles alongside late nineteenth-century paintings) with contemporary works by artists of First Nations descent that speak back to the works by settler artists on display.¹² The MMFA has combined aspects of both approaches: pairing settler- and Native-made objects in some areas, for example, the silver work from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, in other areas, presenting contemporary works that disrupt viewers' expectations of the representation of First Peoples. This is an effective strategy in the "Founding Identities" floor (Fig. 5): immediately faced with the juxtaposition of Nadia Myre's paddler and the crucified Christ, viewers understand that this will not be a standard presentation of Early Canadian art. Monkman's painting is similarly unexpected and shapes viewers' perceptions of the rest of the exhibition. But while the display on this floor successfully accomplishes the task of bringing the aesthetic production of Indigenous peoples into dialogue with settler production, such a conversation is largely absent from the rest of the MMFA's display. "Founding Identities" should, of course, include the work of Aboriginal artists, but could this production not also be integrated into other parts of the pavilion? "The Era of Annual Exhibitions" floor presents several sculptures of Indian scouts and groupings – indeed the cover of the Bourgie Pavilion's catalogue features a reproduction of Louis-Philippe Hébert's *Algonquins* (1916), the model for a large sculpture commissioned for Quebec's Parliament Buildings. What kind of intervention could be made in this space to address the problematic use of Indigenous figures to



5 | Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, “Founding Identities” gallery, Fall 2011. (Photo: MMFA, Denis Farley)

valorize Quebec’s national past? Similarly, portraits of First Nations peoples were regular subjects for members of the Beaver Hall Group, and paintings of Northwest Coast villages by Emily Carr (1871–1945) and Edwin Holgate are featured in “Towards Modernism.” And while these latter works are placed alongside a Tsimshian dancing blanket in a nod to the importance of the *Exhibition of West Coast Art: Native and Modern* presented at the Art Association of Montreal in 1928, there is little reflection on the relations between contemporaneous modes of production and possible exchanges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists that may have occurred during this period.

Such omissions can certainly be justified by the institution’s collecting history. Like most art museums, the MMFA has limited holdings of Indigenous art, although F. Cleveland Morgan’s long association with the Canadian Handicrafts Guild resulted in the MMFA having more historical objects by First Nations artists in its collection than many other fine art museums

in Canada.¹³ However, these objects reflect the taste of the period and the valorization of work from the Northwest Coast and, from the early 1950s onward, the Arctic. If the MMFA's aim is to present a Montreal-centred narrative of Canadian art history, and to have that narrative fully include representative work from First Nations artists from the area, then it will have to mount a strong campaign to encourage acquisitions in this area, as it did to redress the absence of works by French colonial artists. But the omission of works by First Nations artists – historical and contemporary – throughout the Quebec and Canadian art galleries raises another question: the status and perception of those objects within Canadian art history.

In an essay on *Meeting Ground*, the exhibition he curated in 2003 from the Art Gallery of Ontario's permanent collection, Richard W. Hill reflected on the challenges of incorporating Indigenous and settler art. His statement that "Aboriginal art off in a space of its own is not particularly threatening, but the notion that Aboriginal art might enter and trouble the established narratives of 'Canadian' art is something else"¹⁴ expresses the importance of attending to the manner in which displayed objects are incorporated into permanent exhibitions. If objects by Indigenous artists function only as supplementary devices to illustrate settler art and are prevented from questioning the very values that have shaped Canadian art history through their mode of presentation, then the status of those objects is diminished and the canon of Canadian art remains untroubled. Contemporary art that speaks back to a history of colonialism also has its place in such displays, but it too can end up being an isolated device that seeks to emphasize how far we have come as a society; in other words, that we have left our colonial legacy behind and welcome contemporary critique. Both of these approaches further entrench perceptions of Aboriginal peoples and expressive cultures as being located in the past and rely on western aesthetic conventions of museum display to direct and contain the critical force such works might have. A similar point could be raised in relation to women artists, African-Canadian artists, and artists of Asian descent whose work has not been as actively collected as that of their white male counterparts but whose presence in institutional collections is not necessarily reflected in their representation in museums' permanent exhibitions. In the MMFA's current display, for example, the work of the female members of the Automatistes is limited to Maurice Perron's (1924–1999) photographs of Françoise Sullivan's *Danse dans la neige* (1948) in the main gallery of "The Age of the Manifesto" while Marcelle Ferron is represented by the post-Automatiste stained glass work at the Sherbrooke entrance of the pavilion. Shockingly, the "Expanded Fields" gallery proposes a vision of the 1960s and 1970s populated entirely by men, despite an extended discussion of Montreal artist Betty Goodwin in the

pavilion's catalogue. Artists of colour are represented to an even lesser degree although the presence of a painting by Robert S. Duncanson (1821–1872) in the “Founding Identities” gallery calls attention to the Quebec-based work of this important African-American artist. Until we seek to know more about the work of artists of colour in Canada, however, their presence in museum collections and permanent exhibitions will remain limited.

As the discussion of the representation of Indigenous artists, women artists, and artists of colour suggests, inclusion requires more than the addition of previously overlooked figures to an existing narrative of Canadian art history: it demands that we examine the foundations of that narrative and work to develop a new approach that can productively explore the wealth of objects of creative expression from across Canada's many cultures.¹⁵ Indeed, it is imperative for museums as well as art historians to continue to reflect critically on the narratives that they construct. Written texts will always be more amenable to the kind of self-reflexive art history I am calling for because they are not constrained by a specific collection or requirements to display works from important donors. The public nature of museum exhibitions, however, means that curators have greater visibility for their interventions, allowing both for increased critical analysis from outsiders (such as this essay) along with greater opportunities to change perceptions of the history of artistic production in Canada. The MMFA has gone some distance in this attempt, presenting a history of art in Canada that locates its display firmly within the context of the city of Montreal and its own collecting activities. Indeed, the MMFA's installation reveals as much about the impact of institutional tastes on the production of Canadian art history as it challenges conventional narratives of that history. As such, despite some gaps in the material presented, the MMFA's Bourgie Pavilion is remarkable for calling attention to the role that museum collecting practices play in shaping our understanding of the development of artistic production, and for producing a narrative of Quebec and Canadian art that speaks clearly to the specificities of art's history in Montreal.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the students in my Winter 2012 undergraduate seminar on the Montreal Museum of Fine Art's Galleries of Quebec and Canadian art to the writing of this essay. Their enthusiastic engagement with the material in seminar discussions and through their own research has informed many of the ideas presented in this essay, and for that I want to thank them by name: François Abbott, Sabrina Boivin, Béatrice Cloutier-Trépanier, Cliodna Cussen,

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- 2 The closure of all but the main entrance to the Desmarais Pavilion was due to budget cuts.
 - 3 Altmejd’s bronze sculpture is one of three works commissioned for the opening of the pavilion: the other two are Dominique Blain’s (b. 1957) *Mirabilia* (2011), an installation on the Church’s roof visible only from the windows of the pavilion’s third and fourth floors; and Kent Monkman’s painting *The King’s Beavers*, visible on the “Founding Identities” floor.
 - 4 There is no signage indicating the preferred route although attendants will recommend that visitors begin their tour on the top floor. The press release that accompanied the opening of the pavilion as well as the chronological hang of the collection further supports beginning at the top of the pavilion but alternate navigations of the space are easily performed.
 - 5 The painting of Marie-Thérèse Zémire has long held an important place in histories of Canadian art as the best-known work by the country’s first [native-born] artist, François Malepart de Beaucourt. Its display at the MMFA underscores this positioning, as the label text ignores the implications of this raced representation in favour of a discourse on provenance in which the former *Portrait of a Negro Slave* is used to confirm the dates of Beaucourt’s sojourn in Haiti. For an extended analysis of Beaucourt’s portrait in terms of race see Charmaine A. NELSON, “Slavery, Portraiture and the Colonial Limits of Canadian Art History,” in *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art* (New York: Routledge 2012), 63–75.
 - 6 The museum was housed in rooms on the left-hand side of the original Maxwell building and presented decorative art as well as the “primitive art” objects that Morgan argued were an essential component of any major museum. In this view, he was doubtless basing himself on the collecting practices of such institutions as the Victoria and Albert in London and the Metropolitan Museum in New York. See Norma MORGAN “F. Cleveland Morgan and the Decorative Arts Collection in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts” (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1985).
 - 7 There is also a small painting by Michael Merrill (b.1953) based on a display of posters in the passage between Place des Arts metro station and the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal. The posters in Merrill’s painting announce Jungen’s exhibition at the MACM in 2006 and feature Jungen’s *Cetology* sculptures.
 - 8 In Fall 2012, the early Plasticien works were moved to share the outside wall with early works by Molinari and Tousignant, and later geometric work by Automatiste members Fernand Leduc (b. 1916) and Jean-Paul Mousseau (1927–1999). A sculpture by Françoise Sullivan has also been placed in front of this wall. Landscapes by Jean Paul Lemieux (1904–1990) and Jacques de Tonnancour (1917–2005) have been placed in the inner wall of this gallery next to the sculptures
 - 9 See for example, Esther TRÉPANIÉ, “The Expression of a Difference: The Milieu of Quebec Art and the Group of Seven,” in *The True North: Canadian Landscape Painting 1896–1939*, ed. Michael Tooby (London: Lund Humphries in association with the Barbican Art Gallery 1991), 99–116; and François-Marc GAGNON, “La peinture des années trente au Québec,” *Journal of Canadian Art History* 3:1–2 (1976): 2–20.
 - 10 Collection gaps plague most museums and are addressed at different times in an institution’s history. See, for example, this assessment of the MMFA’s collection in

1961 as reported in the pages of *Canadian Art*: “A particular problem for the Montreal Museum has been that a lack of methodological purchasing in earlier years has left gaps in the presentation of the development of Canada’s art. Therefore, by a policy decision, emphasis in the past eighteen months has been placed on buying works of the Group of Seven and significant examples of most members have been acquired. In addition to these, a number of works by the young artists of the Province of Quebec have also been purchased in the belief that while their subsequent evolution will indicate the realization of their promise, the public support of the Museum at this point may encourage or help them.” “The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts,” *Canadian Art* 18:3 (1961): 155.

- 11 Attention to the work of French colonial artists by an anglophone art historian was first given by J. Russell Harper in his 1966 *Painting in Canada: A History* and he garnered much of his information from Gérard Morisset’s *La Peinture traditionnelle au Canada Français*, published in 1960 with a foreword that chastised anglophone art historians for locating the origins of artistic production in Canada in the work of Paul Kane and Cornelius Krieghoff.
- 12 For an extended discussion of these displays see Anne WHITELAW, “Placing Aboriginal Art at the National Gallery of Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Communications* 31:1 (2006): 197–214; and Ruth B. PHILLIPS, “Modes of Inclusion: Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario,” in *Museum Pieces: Towards the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press 2011), 252–76.
- 13 On Morgan’s acquisitions of Indigenous art see Bruce Hugh RUSSELL, “Aboriginal Art,” in *Quebec and Canadian Art: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts’ Collection*, ed. Jacques Des Rochers (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts 2011), 80–5.
- 14 Richard W. HILL, “Meeting Ground: The Reinstallation of the AGO’s McLaughlin Gallery,” in *Making a Noise: Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community*, ed. Lee-Ann Martin (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery/Banff Centre Press 2004), 54.
- 15 For a discussion of the issue of inclusion in relation to works by Indigenous artists see Lynda JESSUP, “Hard Inclusion,” in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, ed. Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization 2002), xiii–xxx.

Un nouveau pavillon d'art québécois et canadien au Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal

ANNE WHITELAW

Le 14 octobre 2011, le Pavillon Claire et Marc Bourgie d'art québécois et canadien était inauguré au Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. Incorporant l'église de style néo-roman Erskine and American, dont la nef avait été reconverte en salle de concert, le nouveau pavillon ajoutait 2 000 mètres carrés et six étages d'espace d'exposition pour la présentation de la collection de plus en plus importante d'art québécois, canadien et autochtone du MBAM. Il a fallu construire, dans l'espace disponible à l'arrière de l'église, des galeries empilées à la verticale qui dictent un parcours spécifique où l'histoire de l'art québécois et canadien est présentée sous forme de vignettes discrètes, en ordre chronologique, depuis l'époque de la colonisation jusqu'aux années soixante-dix. En commençant le parcours à l'étage supérieur, les visiteurs sont invités à regarder des œuvres de la collection d'art inuit du MBAM dans une exposition intitulée « *Takuminartut*: L'art inuit contemporain et actuel de 1948 à nos jours. » Malgré un mode d'exposition plutôt primitif, la galerie décrit l'œuvre des artistes inuits comme étant à la fois « contemporaine » et ancrée dans le mode de vie traditionnel. L'étage qui suit, en descendant, présente « Identités fondatrices » où sont réunies des œuvres d'artistes français et britanniques de la période coloniale à côté d'une sélection d'œuvres contemporaines ou anciennes par des artistes autochtones. Ce qui frappe particulièrement dans cet espace, ce sont les œuvres des artistes autochtones contemporains Nadia Myre, Kent Monkman et Brian Jungen qui tentent de briser le paradigme colonial dominant des sculptures religieuses, portraits et paysages de l'époque coloniale. Les deux étages suivants – « L'époque des Salons » et « Les chemins de la modernité » – retracent le développement de l'art au Canada depuis les années 1880 jusqu'aux années 1930, mais en modifient le discours traditionnel en le présentant selon une perspective montréalaise. Cela se fait soit en mettant l'accent sur la contribution d'artistes montréalais – des années vingt et trente, principalement l'histoire du Groupe du Beaver Hall et de la Société d'art contemporain –, soit en soulignant le rôle de l'institution elle-même – l'histoire du MBAM et de ses Salons de printemps d'art contemporain – dans la construction de l'histoire de l'art.

L'étage suivant intensifie le thème montréalais de l'exposition dans « Le temps des manifestes », qui célèbre l'arrivée de l'abstraction au Canada à travers l'œuvre de trois groupes d'artistes montréalais : les Automatistes, les Plasticiens et les artistes associés à Prisme d'yeux. Comme son nom l'indique, ce large espace célèbre l'arrivée à maturité de l'art québécois par d'importantes présentations d'œuvres de Paul-Émile Borduas, de Jean-Paul Riopelle et de membres des première et seconde générations de Plasticiens. La présentation de l'art québécois et canadien culmine dans le dernier étage, dans la longue galerie du sous-sol qui relie les Pavillons Bourgie et Hornstein. Cette salle présente les œuvres d'artistes principalement abstraits des années soixante et soixante-dix et se relie harmonieusement à l'exposition d'art canadien contemporain dans le sous-sol du Pavillon Hornstein.

Avec le réaccrochage des collections canadiennes au Musée des beaux-arts du Canada (2003) et à l'Art Gallery of Ontario (2008), le réaménagement du MBAM appelle à une réévaluation des principes fondamentaux du discours sur l'histoire de l'art canadien. Au MBAC et à l'AGO, l'objectif principal était l'incorporation d'œuvres d'artistes autochtones, que ce soit par l'inclusion d'œuvres contemporaines, au MBAC, ou par la juxtaposition d'art contemporain par des artistes autochtones en dialogue avec des œuvres coloniales. Bien que le MBAM ait utilisé les deux approches – spécifiquement dans la galerie « identités fondatrices » – le reste de l'exposition est étonnamment dépourvu de toute référence à l'œuvre d'artistes autochtones. La contribution la plus intéressante du MBAM à la reformulation de l'histoire de l'art canadien est l'effort concerté de situer le discours comme étant « de » Montréal. Le résultat est que le modernisme est imaginé moins comme le triomphe de grandes régions désertes que du point de vue de paysages habités et de représentations figurées d'artistes francophones et anglophones du Québec. En outre, l'histoire institutionnelle du MBAM est constamment mise de l'avant dans l'installation, aussi bien pour accentuer certaines tendances de la collection que pour souligner la place centrale des musées dans la construction d'histoires de l'art.