

# Montréal, nouvelle Olympie Montreal, the New Olympia

Andrée Paradis

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## MONTRÉAL, NOUVELLE OLYMPIE



Montréal s'apprête à célébrer, avec le monde entier, les héros de la poésie en action, les *athlètes*, ces dieux qui ajoutent à l'homme la dimension rêvée, celle de la force et du courage conjugués avec l'habileté. Des dons qui nécessitent de régner d'abord sur soi avant de pouvoir se mesurer à autrui.

Montréal s'est donnée des installations olympiques, colossales, dans l'esprit de Babylone et des Pyramides. C'est ici qu'on honorera l'audace, la perfection du muscle, le sens de la coordination, le savoir-faire, le mépris de la fatigue, la détermination et l'intelligence décisive. L'athlète, comme l'artiste, connaissant sa puissance, trouve l'exaltation dans le dépassement de ses limites. Le chef-d'œuvre de l'athlétisme, comme celui de l'art, survit aux athlètes et aux artistes. C'est de cette immortalité dont nous avons besoin; en somme, la vie dans sa prodigieuse intensité.

Montréal, belle et attentive, salue les héros du Stade; elle est fière d'être, pour quelques jours, dépositaire de la flamme des Grands Jeux, d'être l'hôte de tous ces hommes et de toutes ces femmes qui vont nous démontrer que les dieux nous sont toujours nécessaires.

Andrée PARADIS



# TEXTS IN ENGLISH

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## MONTREAL, THE NEW OLYMPIA

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By Andrée PARADIS

Montreal is preparing to extol with the whole world the *athletes*, the heroes of poetry in action, these gods who add to man the dreamed-of dimension of strength and courage combined with skill. Gifts that demand self-mastery before measuring oneself against others.

Montreal has provided itself with colossal Olympic installations, in the spirit of Babylon and the Pyramids. There we shall honour daring, perfection of muscle, sense of co-ordination, *savoir-faire*, scorn of fatigue, determination and decisive intelligence. The athlete, like the artist, knowing his strength, finds exhilaration in going beyond his limits. The masterpiece of athletics, like that of art, outlives athletes and artists. We have need of this immortality; in short, of life in its stupendous intensity.

Montreal, beautiful and courteous, salutes the heroes of the Stadium; it is proud to be, for a few days, the home of the Great Games Flame, proud to host all these men and women who are going to show us that the gods are still necessary to us.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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## QUEBEC TRENDS, 1976 AN IMAGINARY DEBATE

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By Bernard LÉVY

What is the state of art in Quebec? It is difficult to say. And what will be its state to-morrow? Unless we can fluently read a crystal ball... And yet two experts have taken a chance at this puzzle. Mrs. Fernande Saint-Martin, directress of the Museum of Contemporary Art, and Mr. Bogardi, art critic of the *Montreal Star*, have agreed to lend assistance to *Vie des Arts*, not in an exercise in prophecy, but in an effort in analysis and synthesis.

What will be the state of art in Quebec to-morrow? To tell the truth, Mrs. Saint-Martin and Mr. Bogardi have changed the question a little. Their answer contains rather the elements of what ought to be the conditions of the development of the plastic arts in Quebec in the coming years, certain current trends being taken into account.

In a general way, their remarks review the principal chapters of the history of contemporary art (1940-1970) and the noteworthy events in art of recent years (1970-1976). Doubtless the point of departure (1940) and the dividing line (1970)

will be found somewhat arbitrary: however, these references seemed convenient to us in the discussion, whose essence they change not at all.

Those who expect to find here a catalogue of names will surely be disappointed. And certainly, if sometimes the name of an artist or a group is seen in the text it will be as an illustration or an example. This simply allows better placing or applying a principle which, without this type of remark would risk remaining too theoretical or too abstract.

A double thought expressed aloud will, therefore, be found retranscribed here. Double thought and parallel thought, since the two speakers have not met. Accordingly, the debate presented here is an imaginary debate. But we shall see that, in the face of the same questions, although by different paths, Mrs. Saint-Martin's statements and Mr. Bogardi's often agree and particularly on the essential: definitions of art and culture, the rôle of the State, the situation of artists, the function of criticism, etc.

And especially we ought to discern, finally, through the analysis of the two guests who express themselves through *Vie des Arts* as intermediary, how art in Quebec, as it appears in its present different trends, is linked to the admirable interrogation on Art (with a capital A) opening to-day in the world, which will be developed during the coming years.

At first sight, it seems that material and financial conditions enjoyed by artists in Canada are extremely conducive to creating. On that score, the programs of grants and aid to creation set up in Canada and Quebec can be compared to advantage with those of any other country in the world. Further, the austerity decreed by the federal government this year to fight inflation does not affect the artistic sector. But artists cannot live only on grants and bursaries. Therefore most of them teach in colleges or universities.

Surely, if there are still many measures to be found to allow artists to produce under better conditions, it would perhaps be time, Mrs. Saint-Martin wonders, to think of "assuring an essential minimum for everyone, even if it demands the artists being satisfied with it". The solution would not be as Utopian as it seems if complementary measures were matched to it. Thus, if we consider that the work of art belongs to the community, "why should the State not set up very wide means of acquiring works of art?", Mme Saint-Martin continues. But this would still not be enough; the directress of the Museum of Contemporary Art knows it and willingly subscribes to Georges Bogardi's suggestion: "It will be in vain that we create branches of the museum in the underprivileged areas of Montreal, we shall never increase the number of visitors in any but an artificial way; to introduce works of art in the subway, as Malraux did in Paris, is a paternalistic measure if it is not accompanied by previous art education in the schools."

"But precisely during at least the last ten years Education and Social Affairs have never had a predominant part in governmental budgets. Doubtless this is not only a question of money, but also of culture. The latter, it seems,

would be presented in the schools as an entity to be preserved — a tradition — while to-day it is fundamentally an ensemble of judgments that must be re-examined every day."

This is a formula that Fernande Saint-Martin expresses in a different way, since for her "Culture is the result of an investigation of conditioning processes". This does not mean that it is necessary to put the question in terms of "all or nothing". And yet it is there that must be found the first element of the problem of creation in Quebec. There is another element: it concerns the network of information on art.

### The Beginning: Awareness of Contemporary Art

If the *Refus global* was presented entirely as a social confrontation movement, it was no less supported by a will, a dynamics that called forth a renewal in Quebec about 1940. It was due to this foundation that it was able to achieve the success it did. The *Refus global* resulted from a kind of expectation of change in a dark and despairing period. Strongly dependent on Surrealism, it had all the characteristics of a surrealist manifesto, as existed here and there in the West at that period, but, at the same time, it marked the beginning of an "awareness of contemporary art" in Quebec. Whether we consider it an historical accident or not, it was the detonator that evaluated what changed and what shocked and, more, it coincided with a "social thawing".

If we wish to speak of the possibilities of development of a living art in Quebec, we must ponder upon the present Quebec milieu. So, according to Mrs. Saint-Martin, we can understand this milieu only on a base of what it has been these last years, because the relationship to be established with works of art produced to-day depends, naturally, on familiarity with works produced previously.

The retrospective exhibition of works of art from 1940 to 1970, presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art last year, offered the opportunity of becoming aware of what were the profound trends and the meaning that can be given to all these trends which have come about since 1945-1948. With the *Refus global*, it was perceived that art sets itself in contradiction to traditional ways of defining culture as well as reality itself. The automatist movement was defined as a movement of radical opposition to Quebec post-war society. Through the instrumentality of Surrealism, the automatist movement made clear a sort of dispute over what existed. At the same time, it expressed the wish to establish a different, parallel reality, by means of the work of art and poetic experiment. The *Refus global* attempted to substitute for the real another real, a surreal produced by the sensitivity of artists who desired to discover in reality another, less common reality. The movement had very deep roots with a social group that suffered from the limitations and constraints of that period.

Following the art-escapism offered by the automatists came the plasticians' movement that preached a form of art that was, to a greater degree, an expression of reality, a reality upon which artists could act — pictorial space, for example. The beginning of the 60's was a fruitful period for art in Quebec. The time of taking a stand had passed; the moment of creation began. A great number of artists, among whom were several *automatists*, really found themselves then: Comtois, Letendre, Ferron, Gaucher, etc. These years also saw the beginning of Optical Art (Roger Vilder). We were in a period of sculpture rich in promise.