

## **A PREMIERE RETROSPECTIVE: HENRY SAXE WORKS FROM 1960-1993 AT THE MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN STARTING MAY 20**

Montreal, May 17, 1994. The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal presents the first retrospective of works by Canadian sculptor Henry Saxe, May 20 through September 25. The exhibition **HENRY SAXE: WORKS FROM 1960-1993** consists of approximately 110 works spanning a 33 year period grouped together by curator Réal Lussier. It provides visitors with an overview of the work by one of Canada's most important sculptors.

Henry Saxe's work was fundamental in the development of Quebec and Canadian contemporary sculpture. Organized by the Musée, the exhibition will present his first paintings and sculptures from the 1960's as well as modular works and constructivist pieces. One section is devoted specifically to drawing.

### **The first works**

In the early 1960's, Henry Saxe began painting, drawing and printmaking, the latter to which he was introduced by Albert Dumouchel. His work stems from the abstract, his drawings are gestural and his paintings manifest an influence of American abstract expressionism. Later on, the artist created collages and also worked with cutout panels.

In **Lines and Material**, the literature accompanying the exhibit, Marie-France Bérard discusses how the artist turned towards sculpture: "Seeking to convey his graphic explorations in a third dimension, Saxe made a few collages, and then some cutout panels in which he used pure colours. In 1964, he produced his first sculpture, *Sojax*, a piece in painted wood that heralded his imminent abandonment of painting."

From then on, the work of Henry Saxe was quickly transformed. Cutout geometric sculptures evolved towards works placed directly on the floor and ultimately to the module assemblage technique.

### **The 1970's**

Starting in 1970, the module was simplified and became a folding metal rod. Réal Lussier states that, "The works from that time typically are composed of a set of metal rods folded back on themselves to form loops that allow the components to be connected. The result is an extraordinary flexibility in possible arrangements of the modular elements, ranging from a tightly ordered structure to inextricable chaos.

A little later on, the artist abandoned the use of the module and began to experiment with more familiar materials - bits of rope, pipes, rocks, rubber, and manufactured items like ladders and tripods. The objects were chosen for the formal qualities and shed any utilitarian reference. Marie-France Bérard explains that "Preferably, our eye should focus on the materials' contrasting physical and formal qualities - the organic character of the wood in comparison with the mineral nature of the steel, or the rigid aspect of the metal as opposed to the flexibility of the rope."

In 1976, the artist's sculptures took on a constructivist character, displaying a much more unified and concentrated structure. *Eight Stations*, presented in this exhibition, is a good example of this new direction taken by Saxe in his work.

### Recent works

In his more recent work, Henry Saxe continued to show his concern with volume, tension, weight and balance. In 1987, he returned to aluminum, a lighter and more malleable material that reflects light. He experimented with new processes and created airier structures that bring out the mobility of the elements in relation to one another. The *Balls* series, for example, expresses this new rhythm and lightness.

Réal Lussier underlines the contribution of Saxe's work: "Saxe, who began his artistic career in the early 60's, belongs to a generation of artists who has yet to be fully recognized... Not only has his work been daring in its plastic assertions and innovative spirit, it also attests to the aesthetic and formal questioning which contemporary art has undergone in Canada since the sixties.

Henry Saxe will meet the public on Friday, May 20 at 5 p.m. when he will discuss various aspects of his artistic practice.

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Source: Claude Guérin  
Promotion and Public Relations

Information: Louise Faure  
Media Relations Officer  
(514) 847-6232