



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **MARCELLE FERRON A RETROSPECTIVE At the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal**

#### **Marcelle Ferron Fervour...**

Montréal, May 25, 2000. This summer at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, come be a rebel, like Marcelle Ferron, a symbol of women's active involvement on the Québec art scene. Revisit the 50-year career of this *artiste engagée*, through her original abstract painting and her contribution to public art. ***Marcelle Ferron, A Retrospective*** will be presented at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal from June 2 to September 10, 2000.

A co-signatory of the *Refus global* manifesto, Ferron is generally associated with the Automatist movement. In fact, her first mentor was Paul-Émile Borduas, and it was through his canvases that she discovered abstract painting. As she would later conclude, "Abstraction means to abstract from..." and, in her case, "to abstract from nature." Borduas taught her to read her own paintings and asked her to sign the manifesto he had just written. "*Refus global* was plain common sense," she said with her usual verve. But Québec was not ready for that in 1948. There followed the dissolution of the group and a 12-year exile in Paris during which Ferron was introduced to the art of stained glass. As we all know, she subsequently returned to Québec and worked on such projects as the Champ-de-Mars and Vendôme metro stations. Painting was still her passion, however – a painting that proliferated endlessly through this spirited artist's remarkable ability to reinvent herself.

#### **Marcelle Ferron Forever**

Marcelle Ferron was born in Louiseville in 1924. In 1942, she enrolled at the École des beaux-arts in Québec City, which she left two years later to pursue her education on her own. In 1946, she discovered Borduas' painting. It was quite a revelation! She joined the Automatist group, and signed the *Refus global* manifesto in 1948. A visionary at a time when the province was still plunged in the "grande noirceur," she left Québec to settle in Paris, and exhibited in France, Belgium, Italy and Germany, among other places. Back in Québec, the Agnès Lefort and Denyse Delrue galleries, in turn, maintained the visibility of her work. In 1961, she took part in the *VI Bienal* in São Paulo, Brazil, where she won the silver medal. In 1964, she fell in love with "the power of light that shines through glass," and began training in the art of stained glass with master glass artist Michel Blum, in Paris.



She returned to Québec in 1966, at the height of the Quiet Revolution. Five years later, she began a teaching career at Université Laval that would continue until 1988. In 1968, her stained-glass walls at Champ-de-Mars metro station in Montréal were inaugurated. In 1970, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal devoted an initial retrospective to her, entitled *Marcelle Ferron de 1945 à 1970*. In 1973, it was the Musée du Québec's turn to mount a retrospective. In the seventies and into the early eighties, she exhibited her work frequently at Galerie Gilles Corbeil, Montréal. In 1979, she produced the monumental stained-glass window at the Granby courthouse and the installation (stained-glass panels/sculpture) at Vendôme metro station. She became the first woman to win the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas, in 1983. In 1997-1998, the artist was represented in most of the exhibitions held to mark the 50th anniversary of the *Refus global*.

The exhibition follows the path of Ferron's career. The first gallery is devoted to paintings from the Automatist period up until her departure for Europe. Next come the Paris years, from 1953 to 1965, which continue in the second gallery. Part of this gallery is also devoted to her stained-glass works, mainly from 1966 to 1973. A video takes us inside her stained-glass projects, both public and residential, including the dazzling Granby courthouse, the exceptionally fine metro stations in Montréal and some fabulous private homes. The last gallery concentrates on her return to painting, from 1973 to the present.

To look at a work by Marcelle Ferron, we have to let the artist come along with us, and plunge right into pictorial language which is, she reminds us, "a language of its own." Forget figurative references, although she acknowledges that the format influences the reading of the work, with the vertical alluding to portraits, and the horizontal, to landscapes. Her subjects? Movement and light. Her main concerns? The connections between space and colour, line and mass. "What gives a painting life is movement and colour." We have to let ourselves be drawn in by the richness of the pigment, especially red, which she applies in broad spatula and trowel strokes. We have to hear her say that "it is just as hard to paint small pictures as large ones, it just takes less breath for the small ones." And then she emphasizes that a painting is finished "when there is nothing more to add, nothing to take away."

In an interview in 1981, Ferron said that she would write her memoirs at the age of 80. At 76, she has just written, with this exhibition, the best possible biography, using the language that is truly her own: colour and light.

### **The Ferron Event**

A wide range of activities will be offered to the public throughout the exhibition: a video program, workshops for adults, and guided tours for all as well as for groups. In addition, the Mariette Clermont Lounge, adjacent to the exhibition galleries, will be turned into a reading and screening room devoted to Marcelle Ferron.

Lastly, a magnificent 144-page publication on this key figure in abstract art in Québec accompanies the exhibition. It contains four essays, by exhibition curator Réal Lussier, art historians Rose-Marie Arbour and Louise Vigneault, and France Vanlaethem, professor at the UQAM school of design, along with a detailed chronology, extensive previously unpublished photographic material and 70 colour reproductions of the artist's works. *Marcelle Ferron* is co-published by the Musée and Les 400 coups. It may be purchased for \$39.99 at the Musée's Olivieri Bookstore and from other booksellers.

The exhibition opening will take place on Thursday, June 1, 2000 at 6 p.m. in the presence of honorary chairwoman Agnès Maltais, Minister of Culture and Communications. *Marcelle Ferron, A Retrospective* is a presentation of *le lait*.

Take advantage of summer to discover, or rediscover, the Champ-de-Mars and Vendôme metro stations, and to visit the shows of some of Ferron's small works at Galerie Simon Blais (until July 8) and some of her paintings at the Musée de la ville de Lachine (until October 15), in addition to her retrospective at the Musée, of course!

Press kits and visual material available on request.