L'Histoire la Mémoire

Recent Acquisitions of Québec Art

BOUCHARD (SYLVIE) BOULET (FRANÇOISE) CADIEUX (GENEVIÈVE) CAMPEAU (MICHEL) CLÉMENT (SERGE) DUTKEWYCH (ANDREW) GAUCHER (YVES) GOODWIN (BETTY) GOULET (MICHEL) GRANCHE (PIERRE) LAVOIE (RAYMOND) MIHALCEAN (GILLES) RADECKI (BRIGITTE) TATA (SAM) WHITTOME (IRENE)



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Josée Bélisle

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal June 15 – September 3, 1989

L'Histoire et la Mémoire

In a garden, near the grand staircase, in the the vast transverse spaces, a gigantic head dreams beneath an azure sky; dainty shoes on the sidewalk ignore the houses lined up in rows of toy models. Trying not to break any eggs, the green bottle departs for the mountain. Glancing sidelong at the polychromatic Middle Ages, the golden fish slips away into a magical swamp. Sovereign and solitary, the colour grey stands out, next to faces and images sensitive to black and white. In metallic form, it foreshadows monuments How many gestures, impressions and memories are awkwardly suggested in this disconnected fabrication of a story?

Neither the compression of the written word nor the meanderings of discourse are able to define fully the astonishing complexity of a work of art and the automatic plurality of a collection of works of art. While they tackle theory, criticism and commentary, words nevertheless also decline the origins and possible readings of a work, the parametric dimensions of a collection and the intentions and contingencies of its presentation in an exhibition. Some 50 Québec works from the Musée's collection, which were acquired over the past two years, have been gathered here around the notions, both compatible and implacable, of history and memory. From vague allusion to outright statement, from mere trace to fixed date, from sign to signal, close yet contradictory relationships are established. Permeability and transparency, resistance and opaqueness will be topics of discussion.

The general fascination exerted by history, on a personal and a grand level, would seem to be matched only by the merits of the simultaneous grasp of the past and the present spontaneously allotted to memory. "The interest which we think we take in the past," writes Lévi-Strauss in Mythologiques IV, "is only an interest in the present. By connecting it firmly to the past, we think we are making the present more lasting, tying it down to prevent it from fleeing and itself becoming part of the past."1 Whether freely emerging from reminiscence or invested with historical confirmation, events and gestures, beings and things acquire particular statuses and, differently or indifferently, become significant. At first, the preponderance of intimist recollection would seem to lessen in the face of the rigorous, official nature of documenting and explaining the outstanding events of a given period. Actually, it is fairly illusory to consider hierarchically deciding between the respective, and sometimes reciprocal, powers of evocation of the individual and collective memory and the powers of factual, selective inclusion in some chapter of history.

Catherine Lawless points out, in an issue of *Cahiers* devoted to the presenting of the work, that "the work of art meets history

in several ways, which are unevenly observed. In the first place, it partakes of the history of art and, when it is important, it takes part in it, it forms, informs and transforms it."2 Accepted or rejected to varying degrees, according to the trends and movements, the essential contribution made by the work to history, its own and that of its time, is linked in an incidental way to its entry into the museum. "Art history in museums is therefore a collection of aesthetic objects with a stated historical dimension, and an art museum is the Archive of art to the very extent that it has conferred an historical dimension on those aesthetic objects, by the fact of its preserving them."3 It thus proposes a twofold validation - aesthetic and historical - of the object. Referring to the ritual votive offering made by a citizen of ancient Greece, Louis Marin states that such an object "retains the memory of the event by showing its memorial for all to see: it is, with all the other objects amassed as treasure in the temple, the great, visible, monumental archive of the beneficent activity of the god."4 This deliberate coincidence of archivistic and mnemonic functions within the museum institution brings out the special relationship between memory as a means of passing on knowledge and history as a means of access to the universal record.

Although a collection of contemporary art is theoretically dedicated to treating a relatively recent past, it is certainly not out of the question for numerous references to the historical dimension to be observed, and even gathered, in it. The exhibition L'histoire et la Mémoire presents works by 15 Québec artists: Sylvie Bouchard, Françoise Boulet, Geneviève Cadieux, Michel Campeau, Serge Clément, Andrew Dutkewych, Yves Gaucher, Betty Goodwin, Michel Goulet, Pierre Granche, Raymond Lavoie, Gilles Mihalcean, Brigitte Radecki, Sam Tata and Irene Whittome. For most of them — nine out of 15 — the pieces shown are recent ones, dating from between 1985 and 1988 and acquired soon after they were completed. While it is undeniable that the Musée should reflect the latest significant artistic practices, it must also keep on strengthening the foundation of its collection by locating earlier key works that round out or form bodies of work illustrating the main trends in contemporary art in general, and in Québec, in the present instance. All of the works in the exhibition contain obvious or subtle connections with the theme suggested by the title. However, none of them may be summed up or limited solely by the considerations of this particular exhibition.

Memory and history thus represent beacons marking a broad range of investigation and experimentation. There are constant carryovers and reminders, modulating works with diverse contents and styles. Swinging between these two poles, merging or contrasting them, the works selected arise out of differing intentions. Some of them take their argument from a memory of places, counting on their familiarity or strangeness (Raymond Lavoie, Sylvie Bouchard). Others explore the real or imaginary spaces of memory and recreate, as it were, a new architecture of these places (Michel Goulet, Pierre Granche, Gilles Mihalcean). Superimposed on this topographical memory is the memory of people (Geneviève Cadieux), archetypes (Andrew Dutkewych) and the things, both ordinary and eloquent (Betty Goodwin, Irene Whittome), that mark and fix the passage of time.

The referential content favoured by the documentary approach followed in photography (Sam Tata, Serge Clément, Michel Campeau) records sociocultural realities and identities within an artistic practice. The shifts from one medium to the next underlie the critical analysis of the models of artistic tradition (Brigitte Radecki), they trace and continue its history. The historical nature of certain works is indisputable (Yves Gaucher); their place in the individual creative experience and the sharpness and resonance of the aesthetic quest guarantee their intrinsic belonging to the history of art. The judicious choice of materials, supports and techniques is not accidental: it connotes and transcends schools and eras and, in so doing, it challenges and redefines genres, and gives new meaning to systems of representation.

Whether drawing (Françoise Boulet, Raymond Lavoie), printmaking (Betty Goodwin), painting (Sylvie Bouchard, Yves Gaucher), sculpture (Andrew Dutkewych, Michel Goulet, Gilles Mihalcean, Pierre Granche, Brigitte Radecki), assemblage (Irene Whittome), installation (Geneviève Cadieux) or photography (Michel Campeau, Serge Clément, Sam Tata), the works chosen offer so many excursions into formal space, personal worlds and factual knowledge, in short, the inexhaustible universe of ideas.

^{2.} In Cabiers of the Musée national d'art moderne, No. 17/18, "L'œuvre et son accrochage", Paris 1986, p. 3.

^{3.} Jean-Marc Poinsot, "La transformation du musée à l'ère de l'art exposé", in Traverses, No. 36, January 1986, p. 42.

^{4. &}quot;Fragments d'histoires de musées", in Cabiers, op. cit., p. 9.

SYLVIE BOUCHARD

Montréal (Québec), 1959



Untitled, 1986, watercolour on wood, 4 parts 103 x 154.5 cm (each), 206 x 309 cm (overall) acquired in 1987

Sylvie Bouchard's artistic approach, which initially fit more into the category of installation, has always been characterized by the pictorial and drawn transposition of imaginary places and architectures defying attempts at definition and resolution. Although it is certainly not impossible to recognize techniques and manners borrowed from hallowed moments in art history, like the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, it is

more a matter of exploring the potential of figurative representation. With salvaged wood as the support for the work, and water-colour taken out of its usual context (paper and small works), *Untitled* (1986), a poly-chromatic polyptych, presents an enigmatic, dream-like landscape in which the different spaces of memory blend together — real or fictitious, and filled or haunted by plausible or imaginary figures.

FRANÇOISE BOULET

Killarney (Manitoba), 1960



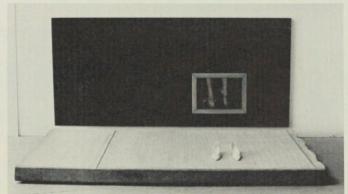
Poisson d'or, 1987 lead pencil and oil pigment on paper, 272 x 549 cm acquired in 1988

At first glance, the lushness and flamboyance of the colour in *Poisson d'or* (1987), a large, important drawing by Françoise Boulet, suggest an inrush of immediate impressions and sensations. The primary role of colour — something new in this artist's practice — still does not contradict the preponderance of the gesture, which is vigorous, feverish and spontaneous. At the border-

line of a kind of abstract figuration, the plant motifs that abound and spread, nourish the metaphoric opulence, which is paradoxically related to the intimist imagination. Impressive in scale, the space of the drawing reveals the inner region and the concrete and intangible traces of the psychic universe subjected to alternative means of representation.

GENEVIÈVE CADIEUX

Montréal (Québec), 1955



L'inconstance du désir, 1988, 5 parts concrete sidewalk 12.7 x 261.5 x 132 cm black and white photograph 122 x 261.5 x 5 cm porcelain shoes, size 37 frame 45.7 x 60.6 cm acquired in 1988

Since the early eighties, Geneviève Cadieux has pursued her investigation of the system of representation by creating striking works focusing on the phenomenon of vision and by analysing the technical and mechanical processes of reproduction. The constants in photographic and cinematographic language (camera, centring, focus, light), which are also those of scientific, clinical observation, are stripped bare and restated in installations shedding light on the way the female identity is presented. In *Linconstance du désir* (1988), the "ravishing" effect exerted by the unexpected association of a pair of ladies'

pumps in pearly porcelain and a reconstructed portion of a concrete sidewalk is obliterated by the presence on the wall of a large black photograph with a detail, in a small frame, of two bare feet with pointed toes. The asymmetrical positioning of the elements in the work, their differences in treatment and the dichotomous contrast between the density and opaqueness of the anonymous concrete and the fragility and transparency of the person's traces all provide signs for apprehending the presence and absence offered as memories to the viewers.

MICHEL CAMPEAU

Montréal (Québec), 1948

A founding member of GAP (Groupe d'action photographique) in 1971, Michel Campeau questions the practice of documentary photography and the intentions and social role of the photographer. The photographic image, ideally suited to a meeting of the social and individual conscience, offers a simultaneous imprint of the photographer's biases and photographed reality. The series Week-end au "Paradis terrestre"! contains images captured between 1973 and 1981, and dwells on certain manifestations of popular Québec culture. Essentially devoted to the activities that mark the weekend break, these shots boldly and accurately convey the ritual aspect of religious ceremonies and sociocultural leisure time. The photographer involves himself in the commentary, the revelation of social roles and the expressive intent of the visual format.

> black and white photographs from the series Week-end au «Paradis Terrestre»!, 1973–1981 recently printed, 40.5 x 50.5 cm acquired in 1987

Fête religieuse portugaise, 1980

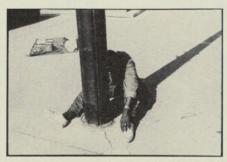




Défilé de la St-Jean, 1981

SERGE CLÉMENT

Valleyfield (Québec), 1950





Paris, France 1985;

Paris, France 1986

black and white photographs from the series *Notes urbaines — suite européenne*, 1984–1986 recently printed, 40.5 x 50.5 cm, acquired in 1987

Serge Clément is part of the movement in photography that contributed to the prominence of the social documentary during the 1970s. Focusing mainly on socio-cultural realities, his approach comes under the heading of commentary and analysis of the collective and individual identity. In his works with a specifically Québec content, such as Les Québécois en vacances (1979), he investigates

the understanding, initially intuitive, of a familiar culture. The selection of photographs from his series *Notes urbaines* — *suite européenne* (1984-1986) bears similarities to the notebook of a stroller spontaneously attracted by some meaningful reality. It proposes a personal, eloquent vision of society, observed according to the stylistic approach of a committed photographic aesthetic.

ANDREW DUTKEWYCH

Vienna (Austria), 1944



Daedalus' Dream, 1986 steel, aluminum, varnish and water, 343 x 220 x 102 cm acquired in 1987

For some 20 years now, Andrew Dutkewych has formulated, in his sculpture and drawing, a rigorous aesthetic first of all characterized by a reinterpretation of minimalist and formalist concerns and then, more recently, by the emergence of poetic and metaphorical contents linked to the myths and archetypes of nature and culture. Faithful to the artist's predilection for rough materials and structural simplicity, the fountain-sculpture Daedalus' Dream (1986) commands attention with the serenity of its vision and the clarity of its formal qualities. The motif of the human head and its monumental scale predispose it to symbolic evocation and summon up the protagonists of the memory, or history, of the world. (In Greek mythology, Daedalus was the sculptor and architect who designed the labyrinth on Crete, in which the Minotaur was imprisoned.)

YVES GAUCHER

Montréal (Québec), 1934

With unrelenting rigour, Yves Gaucher has explored the limits of pictorial abstraction for the past 30 years. Since the early sixties, his printmaking has stood out as among the most original and powerful in updating this medium. It constitutes the imprint of a formal language whose very richness is its extreme reduction, and is especially notable for the serial rhythm enlivening the monochromatic energy fields, the dynamic logic of the contradictory proposition and the shift from symmetry to asymmetry. The Grey on Grey series of paintings, done in 1968 and 1969, represents one of the most decisive groups of works in the artist's production and in the development of geometric abstraction in Québec. The uniformly grey surface is punctuated with individual grey signals, governed by a strict tonal scale. It vibrates and becomes immaterial in favour of a virtual space with deep, muted resonances.



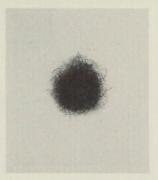
YG 1 O/N, 1968 acrylic on canvas, 274.3 x 202 cm acquired in 1989

BETTY GOODWIN

Montréal (Québec), 1923







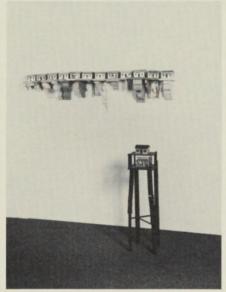
Nest One, 1973; Nest Two, 1973; Nest Three, 1973 etchings, 1/5, 42 x 35 cm (image) acquired in 1988

Since the early seventies, Betty Goodwin's work has developed insistently and brilliantly in many different directions: from printmaking to drawing, from collage to assemblage, from producing the object to restoring its character as object, not to mention pictorial activity *per se* and installation. Her work broaches existential and metaphysical considerations, and scrutinizes the human condition and memory. An examina-

tion of her early drawn and graphic work is especially revealing about the essence of the artistic endeavour. The three etchings in the *Nest* series (1973) contain, in their precise, energetic graphic style and the agile handling of the motif, the artist's exemplary mastery of the technique and her profound empathy for animal evidences, a metaphor for the fragility of human beings.

MICHEL GOULET

Asbestos (Québec), 1944



Modèles, 1985 steel, tin, wood, mixed media and objects wall: 50 x 184 x 26 cm; floor: 109 x 28 x 25 cm acquired in 1986

The sculptures of Michel Goulet impose, quite emphatically, several levels of reading. In the seventies, he created abstract works kept tightly within their elected parameters: plan, articulations, balance, transparency. Since the early eighties, the sculptural object has become naturally associated with the object itself - whether found, made or implied. In Modèles (1985), the initial playful delicacy and assurance fade in favour of direct allusion to the mass production of a kind of domestic bliss. The use of recycled manufactured materials like tin cans, an assortment of brackets permeated with the history of architecture and the characteristic position of the elements of the work - on the wall, a shelf, and in the foreground, on the floor, a construction - prompts a reassessment of the models of consumption, of home-building and of appropriating collective memory.

PIERRE GRANCHE

Montréal (Québec), 1948



Thalès au pied de la spirale, 1988, galvanized sheet metal, wood, 18 figures spiral: 235 x 800 cm (diameter) acquired in 1989 (partial view)

In Thalès au pied de la spirale (1988), Pierre Granche continues the dialogue he has engaged in with history — the history of art and architecture, geometry, and the artist — for close to 20 years now. (Thales was the Greek mathematician and philosopher said to have brought back the principles of geometry from Egypt to Greece in the 6th century B.C.) He is known principally for his work on the frustum shape (a truncated pyramid), which gave rise to multiples and combinatory formal arrangements as well as in situ installa-

tions of extraordinary stylistic richness, and for his discerning interpretation of the Montréal topography. Here, the artist presents an important piece, indoor or outdoor, which makes simultaneous use of architectural, monumental and sculptural space. Eighteen figures, familiar to the artist's vocabulary and inscribed in the arches of the spiral, are silhouetted with humour and poetry in its real and virtual extension and thus sustain the mnemonic metaphor.

RAYMOND LAVOIE

Montréal (Québec), 1950



Référence-souvenir de Bournemouth, dessin nº 5, 1979 graphite and watercolour on paper, 122 x 183 cm acquired in 1987

In Référence-souvenir de Bournemouth (1979), Raymond Lavoie perceptively questions the modernist pictorial proposition. Even more appropriately, he paradoxically uses drawing techniques to do so. To the principles of compatibility of form and ground, he thus adds, within the support and surface, a motif subordinated to perspective and the notion of referentiality of content. Suddenly looming out of nowhere, or out of the memories alluded to in the title, a vague sort of fence merges with the broad gestural

sweeping. There is in this a diversion of the specific nature of painting and an extension of its history. The artist's later works give a convincing account of the relevance of other places — Arènes-lices (1980), Effet cathédrale (1982) — and figures — the Venus de Milo, the artist as model. However, beyond anecdote and personal memory, it is first and foremost a question of painting (Les tableaux sont sourds (1988)), and of everything that fades away before it.

GILLES MIHALCEAN

Montréal (Québec), 1946



Le marais, 1986

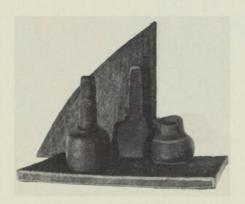
mixed media: plaster, glass, polyurethane, resin, wood, fibre, aluminum 190×457 cm (diameter), acquired in 1987 (partial view)

Since 1968, Gilles Mihalcean has practised a sculpture based mainly on the notion of assemblage, first of all of articulated cellular components and then, gradually, of more composite, interconnected elements. The unusual associations between the various materials employed (wood, concrete, glass, plaster, etc.), the natural, indicial or industrial morphology assigned to them, and the found, manufactured and reinvented objects

used seem to give free rein to plural and personal interpretation. A wonderful story-teller, the artist nevertheless brings the sculptural narrative back within the confines of his aesthetic concerns. In *Le marais* (1986), the colours, textures and materials, magnified by the skilful play of shadow and light, result from a poetic archeology of memories — memories of childhood and memories of art and styles.

BRIGITTE RADECKI

Germany, 1940



Nature morte avec montagne et bouteille verte, 1986 oxidized cement, fibreglass, 73.6 x 99 x 40.6 cm acquired in 1987

In the very literally named work Nature morte avec montagne et bouteille verte (1986), Brigitte Radecki tackles the traditional pictorial genre of still life by the uncommon means of sculptural treatment. Nevertheless claiming ambiguity as the basis of an approach that also falls under the headings of installation and drawing, she makes use of the expressive values of colour and the subtlety of monochromatic variations to define and accentuate the forms and motifs evocative of man's first contacts with matter. The introduction of the plane surface, the allusion to landscape and the traces of perspective confirm the hybrid character and deliberate contradictions proposed by the work and are just as important as the principal attachment to the gesture of the hand.

SAM TATA

Shanghai (China), 1911

Parade, Shanghai 1949 black and white photograph recently printed, 35.5 x 28 cm acquired in 1988



Sam Tata's body of photographic work is considerable. For more than 50 years, first in China and India, and then since 1956 in Montréal, where he settled permanently, he has observed and recorded events, the crowds participating in or undergoing them, and the faces experiencing them. He has been privileged to witness great historic upheavals — the Chinese revolution, the height of Gandhi's influence — as well as everyday events and gestures. His 1948 meeting in Bombay with the famous photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson was a deciding factor for him, and enabled him to break with the academicism

of traditional photography. Whether they be

sobre, gripping documents in the tradition of



Photographer Bill Brandt, London 1978 black and white photograph recently printed, 35.5 x 28 cm acquired in 1988

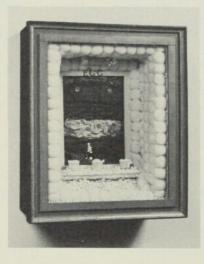
Royal Visit, Montréal 1949 black and white photograph recently printed, 28 x 35.5 cm acquired in 1988



photojournalism, or extraordinary portraits of artists, the photographs produced by Sam Tata throughout his career stem from an intuitive, direct approach to reality and express the humanity and humanism of the gaze he focuses on beings and things.

IRENE WHITTOME

Vancouver (British Colombia), 1942



Egg, 1970 mixed media and objects 70.5 x 58 x 23.5 cm acquired in 1986

Egg (1969-1970) — a glass-covered box enclosing an odd, organized collection of found and made objects - constitutes the leaven of a rich artistic output that has continued to develop and surprise for more than two decades, and is carried on in the current work devoted to the artist's Musée des Traces. As is indicated by the title, which is spelled out inside the work, the egg, microcosm of the universe and embryo of all actions, powerfully suggests the notions of envelope and receptacle and, by extension, the notions of the studio contained in a box and of the museum shell, both of these being favoured places for gathering, classifying and cataloguing objects. Preciously enshrined, these recreated artifacts (buttons, fabrics, cotton batting . . .) emerge out of a patient archeology of memory and knowledge, of natural and cultural history. Irene Whittome explores and pushes to its ultimate limits the forming of the object in private, and its presentation in public.

L'Histoire et la Mémoire

AN EXHIBITION ORGANIZED BY THE MUSÉE DART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL FROM ITS PERMANENT COLLECTION

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LIST OF WORKS

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8 black and white photographs from the series Week-end au «Paradis Terrestre»!, 1973-1981, recently printed acquired in 1987

Jardin botanique, 1980 50.5 x 40.3 cm

Fête religieuse portugaise, 1980 40.5 x 50.5 cm

Fête religieuse portugaise, 1980 40.2 x 50.3 cm

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Piscine olympique, 1981 40.5 x 50.5 cm

Défilé de la St-Jean, 1981 40.5 x 50.5 cm

SERGE CLÉMENT

13 black and white photographs from the series Notes urbaines — suite européenne, 1984-1986, recently printed acquired in 1987

Jardin des plantes, Paris 1984 40.5 x 50.5 cm

Venise, Italy 1984 40.5 x 50.5 cm

Pise, Italy 1984 40.5 x 50.5 cm

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Sao Joao de Argo, Portugal 1985 40.5 x 50.5 cm

Paris, France 1985 40.5 x 50.5 cm

Paris, France 1986 40.5 x 50.5 cm

Pointe-du-Raz, Brittany 1986 40.5 x 50.5 cm

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Mont Saint-Michel, France 1986 50.5 x 40.5 cm

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22 black and white photographs, 1948-1982, recently printed acquired in 1988

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Henri Cartier-Bresson, Bombay 1948 35.5 x 28 cm

Calcutta, Bombay 1948 28 x 35 cm

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Refugees, North Station, Shanghai 1949 28 x 35.5 cm

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Panade, Shanghai 1949 35.5 x 28 cm

Coolie Woman, Moonsoon, Bombay 1949 28 x 35.5 cm

Kashmiri Woman and Child, Srinagar 1955 35.5 x 28 cm

Royal Visit, Montréal 1959 28 x 35.5 cm

Siesta, Florence 1959 35 x 25.5 cm

Painter-Photographer Charles Gagnon, Montréal 1971 30.5 x 23 cm

Hasidic Jews, Rosh Hashanah, Montréal 1971 28 x 35.5 cm

Theatre, Tokyo 1973 28 x 35.5 cm

Artist Jacques de Tonnancour, Montréal 1973 30 x 23 cm

Actor Donald Sutherland, London 1976 35.5 x 28 cm

Jacques-Henri Lartigue, photographer, Paris 1976 35 x 25 cm

Painter Guido Molinari, Montréal 1976 30.5 x 23 cm

Photographer Bill Brandt, London 1978 35.5 x 28 cm

Painter Yves Gaucher, Montréal 1978 23 x 30.5 cm

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