

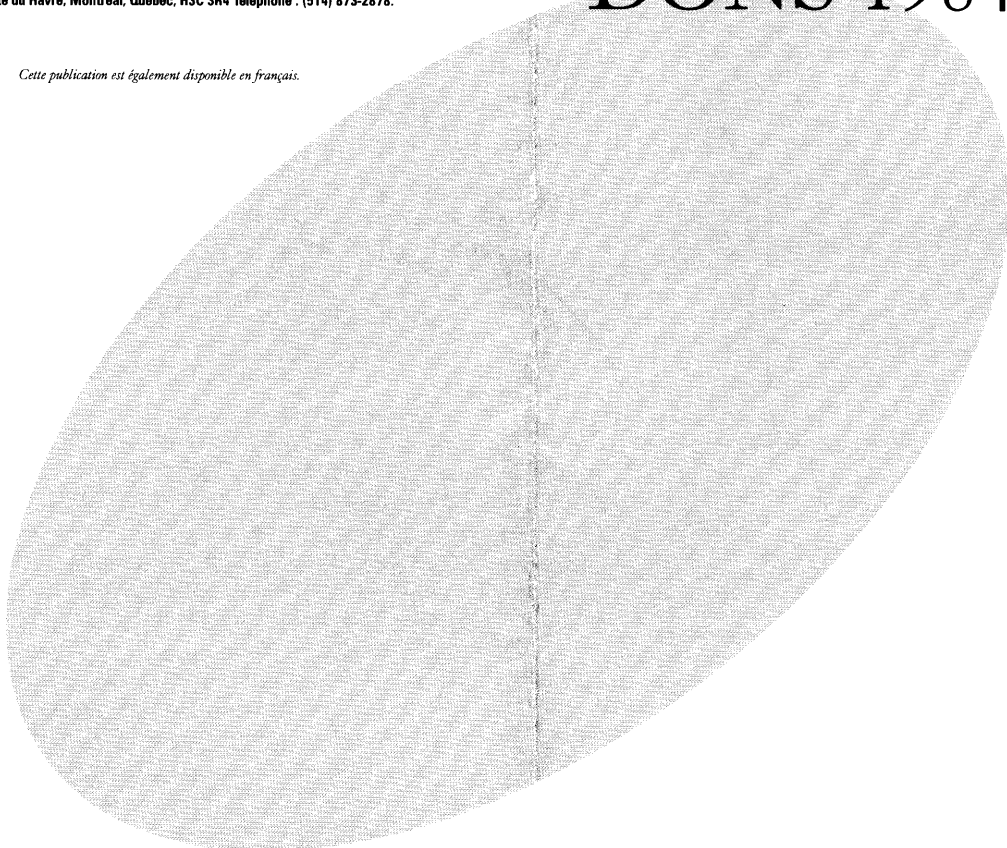
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# Une histoire de collections DONS 1984 - 1989



MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

## Henry Saxe

Montréal, Québec 1937

The exhibition *Une histoire de collections. DONNS 1984-1989* presents a selection of some 200 works from the 305 gifts received since 1984, the year the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal became a government corporation.

It is significant to find, throughout the history of the Musée, the presence of exhibitions devoted to acquisitions (purchases, gifts or bequests<sup>1</sup>). This presence is not accidental. Right from its inception, "artists, gallery owners, art lovers and collectors, businessmen and critics were directly involved in the discussions surrounding the creation of the Musée d'art contemporain. Establishing such an institution seemed so essential to them that many artists did not hesitate to offer one of their works to form the Musée's first collection."<sup>2</sup> Twenty-five years later, we find this same commitment and fervour. Gifts made by passionate, dedicated collectors, artists and gallerists have added much to the acquisitions of the collection. In fact, one work in four is a gift.

The following notes offer for your consideration four works from the 200 exhibited, selected using the same criteria that constitute the richness and originality of collectors' choices.

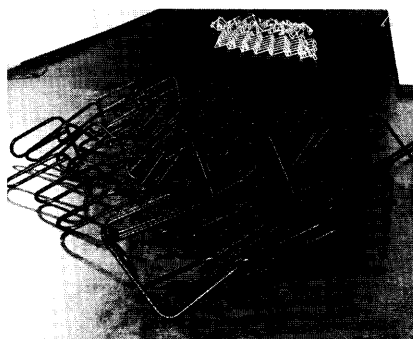
<sup>1</sup> Gift : act of transferring ownership of a work, without compensation.

Bequest : gift made through a provision of a will.

<sup>2</sup> Historical background. Excerpt from the report submitted to the advisory committee on the projects for building a concert hall for the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and a new home for the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, August 1986.

In the past five years, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal has acquired 10 works by Henry Saxe (two sculptures and eight drawings) thanks to the combined efforts of gallerist Gilles Gheerbrant and the artist. These gifts once again underscore the commitment demonstrated by the artistic community over the history of the museum. *Seaplex* (1970) is one of the two sculptures donated by Saxe; the other is *Tractor* (1969).

Considered one of the leading sculptors in Canada, Henry Saxe first became known for his paintings, prints and drawings. He attended Sir George Williams University (1955-1956) and the Montréal École des beaux-arts (1956-1961). In 1961-1962, he studied printmaking with Albert Dumouchel. His painting shows the influence of American abstract expressionism. He created his first wood sculpture in 1964. The following year he abandoned painting. There followed a period devoted to a study of modular elements, which led, in 1970, to a search for simplification through the use of a single element: the line. A number of artists in Québec have explored this kind of simplification by means of a single motif —



Henry Saxe  
*Seaplex*, 1970  
Vinyl-covered wood  
4.57 × 4.57 m  
Gift of Mr. Henry Saxe  
Acquired in 1988

Molinari, using a band of colour, Tousignant with a target shape, and Hurtubise with the patch of colour. *Seaplex* belongs to this period. According to Saxe, "each of those sculptures was made of units of equal size and shape, forming a grid-like pattern when assembled that could be completely transformed and would adapt in shape to specific indoor or outdoor spaces." This concern with the surroundings of the piece made him one of the country's pioneers of installation art.

In reaction to his earlier work (two-dimensional structure, system based on the repetition of connections between two points), Saxe progressed to a ternary system, adopted rough materials and examined relations and contrasts between materials.

He represented Canada at the Venice Biennale in 1978.

Henry Saxe has lived and worked in Tamworth, Ontario since 1973.

## Alfred Pellan

Québec City, Québec 1906-1988

The collector Max Stern played a leading role in the coming of modern art to Québec. The major bequest made in 1988 by the Max and Iris Stern Foundation is representative of names that left their mark on the history of art of the early part of this century: John Lyman, A.Y. Jackson, Emily Carr, Jean Arp, Henry Moore and Alfred Pellan.

At the time Bauhaus was happening, Québec was a quarter of a century behind. It took a Pellan to travel to Paris for the beginnings of modernism to take shape here. In 1926, Pellan won the first scholarship awarded by the province of Québec to study at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris. It was, he says, "a delight to discover contemporary art which was at that time unknown to most Québécois." He became familiar with the colourist experiments of Van Gogh, Bonnard, Matisse and Derain. After his scholarship ran out in 1930, he stayed on in Europe until 1940, when he was forced to return home because of the war.

That same year, the Musée de la province de Québec (now the Musée du Québec) and the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts devoted a major exhibition to him. The general commotion he caused by rehanging all his works in Québec City heralded the upheavals he was to create throughout his career, including differences with Charles Maillard, director of Montréal's École des beaux-arts where the overly academic teaching exasperated Pellan, and confrontations with Paul-Émile Borduas starting in 1948. That year, to counter the rise of Borduas' Automatist movement, Pellan founded the Prisme d'yeux group which published a manifesto bearing the same name in February, while Borduas' *Refus global* was published in August. "I wanted those working from another viewpoint not to be slaves to Automatism and to be able to live out their own art." Nine years earlier, John Lyman, in collaboration with Paul-Émile Borduas, had founded the Contemporary Arts Society. This society, "open to all trends in contemporary art," was the forerunner of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. In 1952, Pellan returned to Paris, but came back three years later "disappointed by the artistic climate." He settled permanently in Auteuil, Québec, where he pursued a prolific career until his death in 1988. In 1984, in an irony of fate, he won the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas for "the quality and originality of his work and for the innovating and liberating role he played in Québec."

*Nature morte à la pipe* fits into that effervescent period in Pellan's career between the enthusiasm of Paris and the passion of *Prisme d'yeux*.

The visionary Pellan recommended in 1980, in a collective work entitled *Montréal : la prochaine décennie*, moving the Musée d'art contemporain to a site beside Place des Arts.

## Une histoire de collection DONS 1984-1989

An exhibition organized by the  
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal  
from its permanent collection



Alfred Pellan  
*Nature morte avec pipe*, c. 1943  
Oil on canvas  
99.7 x 80 cm  
Gift of the Max and Iris Stern Foundation  
Acquired in 1988

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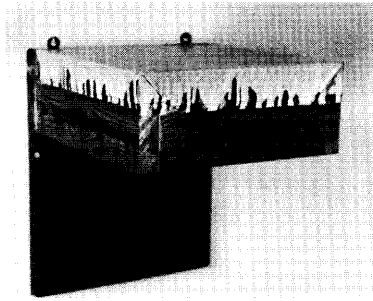
### Printing

Imprimerie O'Keefe

## Guy Pellerin

Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts, Québec 1954

Guy Pellerin  
*Tablette blanche*, 1981  
Wood, canvas, enamel  
26 × 22 × 23 cm  
beq. René Payant  
Acquired in 1988



In 1988, art critic and theoretician René Payant bequeathed a collection of great importance, in terms of both the number of works and their quality. *Tablette blanche* (1981) is among the 35 Québec works in the 45 pieces acquired through the bequest. All produced in the last two decades, these works represent the main trends in the art of the seventies and eighties, between the explosion of disciplines (post-modernism) and the advent of the new figuration (assimilation of the experiments of abstract and figurative art).

Guy Pellerin studied visual arts at Université Laval in Québec City and at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. Preoccupied by the interaction between sculpture and painting since 1979, Pellerin first concentrated on sculptural exploration before shifting over to painting. René Payant described the hybrid nature of his works, in fact, in an article dating from 1982. "However, in the expression of this pictorial desire, this pictorial pleasure (material and chromatic), Pellerin does not sacrifice the presence of the canvas support. That is why his works share a number of characteristics with sculpture. Moreover, the expressive force of these works emanates directly from this ambiguity, from this tension between the support and the canvas, between the effects of sculpture and painting. The two genres are not brought into confrontation, but merged together without synthesis. In other words, they do not cancel each other out but are already more autonomous. Their hybrid nature separates these works from painting and sculpture but, no doubt, makes them unthinkable without those disciplines. They thus testify to a critical historical consciousness by signifying that painting and sculpture are genres that are disintegrating but do not necessarily collapse, because they refresh them by making them filter into one another." Since 1982, Pellerin has devoted himself to creating "object-paintings" with autobiographical references.

Guy Pellerin lives and works in Montréal. His pieces have been presented, among other places, at *Chambre Blanche*, *Galerie Jolliet* (Québec and Montréal), the *Art Gallery of Ontario* and the *Musée du Québec*.

## Gyula Pap

Oroszaza, Hungary 1899

*Soucoupes* is one of a group of 18 photographs acquired in 1986-1987 as a gift from gallerist Gilles Gheerbrant. This group includes works by Irena Blühova, Lotte Gerson Collein, Lux Feininger, Albert Hennig, Gyula Pap and Hajo Rose, all of whom studied at the Bauhaus school. The Bauhaus (a combination of the German words *Bau*, meaning construction, and *Haus*, meaning house) was meant literally to be a house for building. Founded in 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius, it existed for 14 years and at three locations in Germany: Weimar (1919-1924), Dessau (1925-1932) and Berlin (1932-1933). This university level institution merged the functions of a school of design and a school of technology, in a desire to end the distinction between fine and applied arts. Its courses and studios favoured the interdisciplinary approach. Some of the great names of modern times taught there: Josef Albers, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Marcel Breuer and Mies Van der Rohe.

The painter, printmaker and sculptor Gyula Pap ranks among the most respected modern Hungarian artists. He studied graphic arts in Vienna (1914-1917) and Budapest (1918). He entered the Bauhaus in 1920 and remained there until 1924. At that time, impressionist photography was still the prevailing influence. Pap, along with Georg Muche, was one of the few artists at the Bauhaus to be interested in the new photography. In fact, when Pap was at the school, there was no photography studio. It was not until 1925 that one was added to the department of "typography, exhibition design and advertising," and not until 1929 that photography became a separate course.

In Germany, the "new vision" was brought in by the self-taught photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch. Realism, clarity, a limiting framework and unusual perspectives characterize his photos, which focus on everyday objects, machines and industrial designs. Pap's *Soucoupes*, from 1928, eloquently testifies to the new photographic vision eventually adopted by the Bauhaus.

Pap taught in Berlin and then Budapest, where he created a school modelled after the Bauhaus.



Gyula Pap *Soucoupes* 1928  
Silverprint photograph (Printed 1983) 43.6 × 30.5 cm  
Gift of Mr. Gilles Gheerbrant, acquired in 1986