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Triggers. Art and Society. Québec in the 60's and 70's

SCULPTURE SYMPOSIUMS



MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

Québec ::

SCULPTURE SYMPOSIUMS

The Early Decades

A sculpture symposium is defined as a gathering of artists who, for a certain time and in a given place, execute a large-scale permanent work in public, intended for an outdoor site and acquired by the promoter of the event. For the artists, it is a unique opportunity to fraternize and work with professionals in different fields.

The first sculpture symposium was held in a quarry in Austria, in 1959, on the initiative of the sculptor Karl Prantl. The emergence of such events in Québec, in the mid-sixties, was part of the general movement towards greater openness and the dissemination of art outside traditional venues, usually galleries or museums. Happenings and monumental works erected in public spaces, and the integration of art into architecture and the environment are some of these modes of intervention which, with symposiums, help give art a heightened social dimension and impact. Added to this desire for external display is the wish, at symposiums, to get closer to people. The fact of working in plain view of the public permits a demystification and greater understanding of sculpture, along with immediate feedback from the viewer.

Symposiums introduce a special dynamics between three indissociable entities: the creator, the work and the viewer. Usually separate, these elements merge together at symposiums. The sculptors are then prompted to question their role and artistic practice, to give them new meaning by reconsidering their work in the studio and their approach to the medium, and to break out of their isolation. By bringing the sculpture outside, by

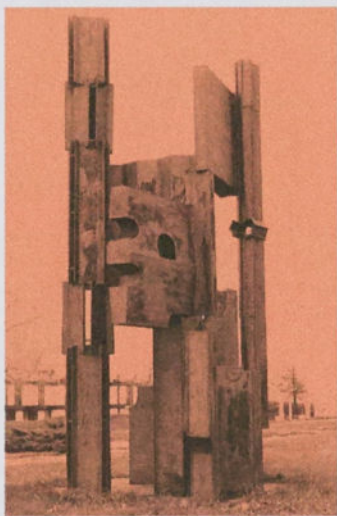
placing it in a *real* situation, the artist restores its presence and monumentality.

All this opening up does not necessarily run smoothly, however. New problems arise, notably those of the permanence and preservation of works at outdoor sites. This is a matter that sometimes raises lively controversies, like the unfortunate case of the Alma symposium in 1966, and the ensuing trial.

During the sixties and seventies, twelve sculpture symposiums were held in Québec. They led to the erection of some 100 works, produced by national and international artists and spread through a dozen cities: Montréal (1964 and 1965), Alma (1965 and 1966), Joliette and Québec City (1966), Schefferville/Sept-Îles and Manicouagan (1970), Québec City (1970), Longueuil (1972), Matane (1975) and Terrebonne (1978).

The sculptures from some of these early symposiums have now disappeared or been relocated. Such is the case with the works in the international symposium of 1965, at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, then housed in the Château Dufresne on Sherbrooke Street East. The nine artists built pieces made of welded, cutout metal, which are now part of the Musée's Collection. As for the Québec City symposium of 1966, the seven works made of wood and scattered over the Plains of Abraham have all been destroyed, for lack of proper maintenance.

The 1970 symposium at the Centre d'art de Manicouagan brought together students from the École des beaux-arts, including Donald Darby, Jacques David, Jerry Giles, Louise de Grosbois, Gilles



Ivanhoé Fortier, *Sans titre*, 1965
Steel. Height: 4.2 m
Photo: Claudette Desjardins



André Condé, *Un château d'été*, 1966 [detail]. Elm
Photo: Luc Chartier, Musée du Québec



Pierre Bourgault, *Cabane dans un arbre avec téléphone*, 1970
Wood. Photo: Krieber

Garant, Esther Lapointe, Jacques Latendresse, Gilles Lauzé and Réal Lauzon. Since the building has been sold, some of the sculptures have been destroyed or moved. The piece by Donald Darby was acquired by the Art Bank of Canada, in Ottawa. Another symposium, focusing on wood carving, took place the same year at Parc Samuel Holland, in Québec City. It was organized, as part of the summer festival, by Pierre Bourgault and students at the École de sculpture sur bois in Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, who created sculpture-toys of which only photographic records remain.

Like the photograph, which perpetuates an instant in the past, the sculptures at symposiums fix a moment that has happened. A gesture has been made, not in the privacy of the studio, but publicly: artists, for a certain time, in a certain place, have worked together to construct forms, a third dimension.

This collective memory and cultural heritage can still be seen today by visiting the sites of the various symposiums. The following route will take you from Montréal to Joliette, by way of Longueuil and Terrebonne; or alternatively, to Alma, Schefferville, Sept-Îles and Matane.

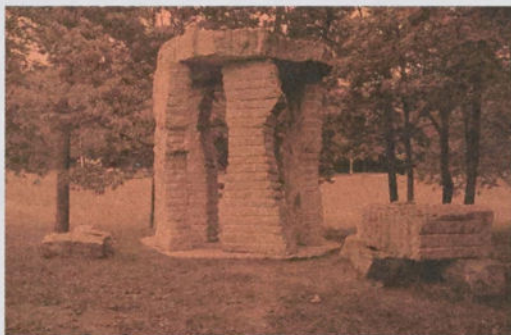
MONTRÉAL

PARC DU MONT ROYAL

Instigated by sculptor Robert Roussil, the Symposium international de Montréal (1964) was the first sculpture symposium in North America. International in scope, it took place in Mount Royal Park and brought together twelve Canadian and international artists: Irvin Burman, Augustin Cardenas (Cuba), Louis Chavignier (France), Eloul Kosso (Israel), Krishna-Reddy (India), Josef Pillhofer (Austria), Robert Roussil, Carlo Sergio Signori (Italy), Sklavos (Greece), Pierre Szekely (Hungary), Armand Vaillancourt and Shirley Witebsky. Most of the sculptors worked in stone, except Vaillancourt who preferred cast iron, and Roussil, who used metal (his work has been removed from the site). You will notice, in particular, the piece by Eloul Kosso, which deals directly with the site and juts out from a small rise, along with *Le Grand Manège*, by Louis Chavignier, designed like a building of stone blocks is an allusion to architecture.



Eloul Kosso, *Sans titre*, 1964
Stone and concrete
Height: 2.94 m. Photo: S. F.



Louis Chavignier, *Le Grand Manège*, 1964. Stone
Height: 3.14 m. Photo: S. F.

LONGUEUIL

PARC FERNAND-BOUFFARD



Anonymous work by
a student at the École
des beaux-arts, 1972
Photo: S. F.

This symposium was part of the Longueuil summer festival, and was put together by the group *Transition*, formed of ten students at the École des beaux-arts. Concurrently with the symposium, the group organized theatre, film, dance and pop orchestra events, as well as art workshops for children. The works, all of them anonymous, are located in Fernand-Bouffard Park (formerly Duvernay Park), on Duvernay Street, near Joséphine Street.



Anonymous work by
a student at the École
des beaux-arts, 1972
Photo: S. F.

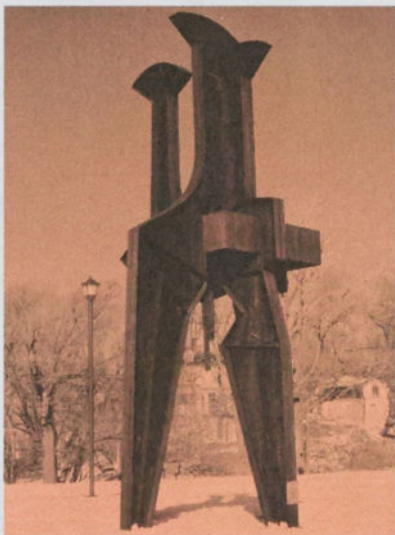
TERREBONNE

ÎLE DES MOULINS

Robert Saucier, *Sans titre*, 1978
Steel, steel cable, stretchers, concrete
Approx. 1.82 x 7.62 x 4.57 m
Photo: R. Saucier



Made up of sculptors André Geoffroy, Jacques Huet, Richard Klode, Robert Nepveu, Gilles Payette, Denis Poirier and Robert Saucier, the Terrebonne sculpture symposium took place in 1978 on the historic site of Île des Moulins, classified as a cultural heritage site. As at the 1975 Matane symposium, the works were chosen by the public. Out of the 80 models proposed, 25 were submitted to popular vote after being preselected by a jury. A number of sociocultural activities were organized in conjunction with the symposium: art, pottery and batik workshops, performances, exhibitions, sidewalk cafés and outdoor fairs.



Jacques Huet, *Nous trois*, 1978
Cor-Ten steel. 6 x 3.65 x 2.74 m
Photo: Pierre Deschênes

JOLIETTE

Pierre-Roland Dinel, *Totem (Hommage à Nelligan)*, 1966. Carved wood. 4.87 m
In the background: Paul Borduas, *Abstraction*, 1966. Steel. Photo: René Castonguay



Ethel Rosenfield, *Hommage au soleil*, 1966. Stone
Photo: Ginette Clément
Courtesy Musée d'art de Joliette

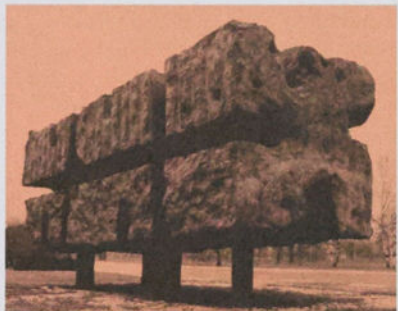
Held in connection with the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day celebrations, this 1966 symposium took place on the esplanade at Place Bourget, in Joliette, and brought together six sculptors: Paul Borduas, Maximilien Boucher, Pierre-Roland Dinel, Joseph Marcil, Ethel Rosenfield and Gaétan Thérien. It elicited certain reactions, sometimes vehement, from citizens who did not really understand the “abstract art” taking shape before their eyes. Journalists from the local press conducted “man-in-the-street” interviews, which expressed viewers’ surprise and confusion in the face of the phenomenon of *new sculpture*. Dinel’s *Totem* and the abstract piece by Borduas, in particular, astonished and even disturbed passersby with their daring and novelty. The symposium’s sculptures are now spread out in various locations in town.



ALMA

PARC FALAISE

The 1965 symposium, nicknamed the *Melchers Symposium*, comprised eight artists (four of them from the region): Bertrand Audet, Jean Briand, Normand Lefebvre, Harry C. Noordhoek, Robert Roussil, Danielle Roux-Lavoie, Michel Tanguay and Armand Vaillancourt. Sponsored by La Fondation Melchers, with the support of the Alma junior chamber of commerce and local companies including Alcan, Granite National and Calcites du Nord, the event was part of the Festival d'Alma (La Grande Nuit d'Alma) and complemented the usual festivities such as the parade, street dance and shows capping off the *Huitaine de la gaité*. Set up in the park between the town hall and the rectory, the sculptors were invited to work with local materials: wood, granite, aluminium and calcite. (The work by Armand Vaillancourt was shipped to Montréal for purchase and presentation at Expo 67. It was then sent on to the campus of York University, in Toronto, where it still stands.)



Armand Vaillancourt, *Présence*, 1965
Black granite cut with a jet stonecutter
Photo: Centre de documentation Yvan
Boulerice.

The provincial symposium of 1966, organized by Alma-Festival Inc., gathered artists Marc Boisvert, Jacques Chapdelaine, François Dalleuret, André Fournelle, Peter Gnass, Jean-Gauguet Larouche and Raymond Mitchell. The event was marked by several controversies: a protest by the sculptors because the youngest of them (Mitchell) was being paid less; a strike by the sculptors who opposed having their pieces shipped to Montréal for Expo 67; and a lawsuit for damages and interest brought against the city by the artists. At the end of the symposium, in fact, because preparation of the site planned to receive the sculptures was not complete, the works were put away on a vacant lot, and then abandoned, or even defaced or thrown in the river. Today, most of the works from the two symposiums are installed either in the centre of town or in Parc Falaise.



André Fournelle, *Poly Balancier*, 1966
[Détail]. Cast iron, H-beams, steel,
laminated wood, concrete, fibreglass.
9.14 x 13.71 m

SCHEFFERVILLE / SEPT-ÎLES



Germain Bergeron,
Homme de fer, 1970
Photo: Germain Bergeron

Entitled *Formes nouvelles du Québec*, the 1970 symposium in Schefferville/Sept-Îles was made up of Gérard Bélanger, Germain Bergeron, Jean-Gauguet Larouche and Lewis Pagé. It marked the centennial of the discovery of iron ore in Northern Québec by Father Louis Babel. The event was organized in the form of a competition, with candidates sending in their proposals anonymously. Of the 60 or so sketches submitted, four were selected. *Homme de fer*, by Germain Bergeron, sparked some controversy, and the incident provided material, several years later, for Guy Cloutier who wrote a play, *La Statue de fer*, set in Schefferville. The play examines the hard living conditions and unemployment in remote areas. The Gérard Bélanger work was recently installed in the Musée régional de la Côte-Nord, in Sept-Îles.



Gérard Bélanger, *Hommage
à l'industrie du fer*, 1970
Metal. Length: 6.7 m
Photo: G. Bélanger

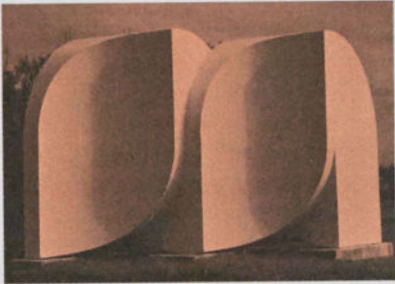
MATANE

PARC DES ÎLES

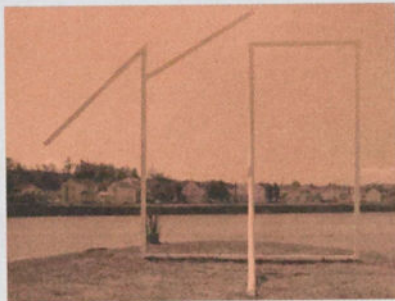
The Matane sculpture symposium, in 1975, took place in Parc des Îles on the Matane River and comprised seven sculptors: Delphis Bélanger, Jean Bélanger, Albin Courtois (Belgium), Pierre-Roland Diné, André Geoffroy, Jacques Huet and Lisette Lemieux. The event was characterized by a desire for organizational democratization. A competition was launched, and more than 120 projects were submitted. A jury selected 20 proposals, models of which were exhibited, and then voted on by the public. More than 800 votes were cast. A parallel program of activities, entitled *Sauvage Katpat*, was staged, with exhibitions, craft workshops, art workshops for children, and theatre and other performances. ■

SERGE FISETTE

Serge Fiset is the editor of *Espace* magazine and author of the book *Symposiums de sculpture au Québec, 1964-1997* published by Centre de diffusion 3D.



Lisette Lemieux,
Sculpture modulaire, 1975
Fibreglass. 1.2 x 3.6 x 1.2 m
Photo: Perry Gagné



Jean Bélanger, *Arc de triomphe*, 1975
Metal. 4.87 x 3.04 x 3.65 m
Photo: Perry Gagné

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