

MONTREAL

A City, Its Museums

ESTATES-GENERAL ON MONTREAL'S MUSEUMS
MARCH 5, 6 AND 7, 2003

FINAL REPORT



Société des directeurs
des musées montréalais

*This report was prepared by Bernard Chassé and Laurent Lapierre
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Montreal, April 28, 2003

Helen Fotopulos
Member responsible for Culture and Heritage
Executive Committee, City of Montreal

Dear Ms. Fotopulos,

Montreal, A City, Its Museums is a summary of the proceedings of the Estates-General on Montreal's museums organized by the Board of Montreal Museum Directors, from March 5 to 7 of this year, and followed by a virtual forum. It describes the vibrant presence and the essential contribution made by all Montreal's museums to the city's cultural life. The report has a twofold goal: to signal the importance of contributions and commitments by Montreal's museums and to propose a new partnership between the City of Montreal and all the museums on the Island.

Montreal is one of the great cultural capitals of North America. As it is considering and drawing up a municipal cultural policy, the City can look to its museums as natural partners.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marcel Brisebois". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Marcel Brisebois
Chair of the Estates-General
Director, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

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PREAMBLE

Montreal's museums are among the city's oldest cultural institutions.

Their story is a tribute to the vibrant spirit of Montreal. Through their actions, their commitments, their individual approaches, their architecture and the wealth of their collections, they have also contributed—and still do—to making Montreal the city we know today.

Museums are true cultural reference points, in that they illustrate our constantly changing urban culture. They play a key role in preserving Montreal's heritage and collections.

Places of living memory, constantly renewed, museums provide opportunities for Montrealers to meet and converse with each other, transcending differences. They create culture and share it with visitors and the community as a whole, helping to build Montreal's identity.

Over the years, Montreal's museums have worked together to build true partnerships, a phenomenon uncommon in North America. One of the tools that facilitates this kind of exchange and collaboration is the Board of Montreal Museum Directors (BMMD), which encourages the development and outreach efforts of the network of Montreal's museums. There are many examples of successful co-operation (loans of artwork, exchanges of museologists' skills or expertise, joint publications, travelling exhibitions, varied activities including Montreal Museums Day, services offered through the Montreal Museums Card, the Museum Collections Centre, etc.). Such joint initiatives are proof of their determination to carry out their educational mission for the benefit of the widest possible audience.

PART I

General Considerations

Heritage and collections in Montreal's museums

Museums are the only cultural and heritage institutions whose mission is to preserve objects, places and buildings that speak of Montreal's identity. They represent our common memory: recalling events of yesterday, but also those of today and the history to be written tomorrow.

Since heritage is both material (properties, furnishings, landscapes, archaeological finds, etc.) and immaterial (a community's knowledge and expertise), it is urgent that the necessary political and economic tools be developed to protect and share our heritage properly and as permanently as possible.

To do this we must identify, locate and record this heritage (where it is found, little-known private collections, etc.) and suggest means of acquiring and conserving it, both for collectors and museums. Remember that in recent years, a good many prestigious private collections have left Montreal, and even Canada in some cases, because their true value was not recognized or because of disagreements between collectors and the Quebec and Canadian governments. If we are to prevent such situations from recurring, it is important that Montreal's heritage be kept here, that it be developed and displayed, interpreted, and made available to Montrealers.

The heritage and collections in Montreal's museums hold many true national treasures that deserve to be better known. They are a mirror of Montreal, a reflection of its distinct identity. When

Montreal's museums acquire collections of international importance, they help to attract researchers and tourists interested in seeing these collections. Consequently, the City must not only encourage access to the heritage and collections of museums on the Island, but contribute to showcasing them both here in Montreal and abroad.

In doing so it can count on the expertise of curators and museologists who assist in showcasing these treasures by producing high-quality exhibitions and publications and on the close bonds that Montreal's museums have forged with museums outside of Canada.

Museums also help to showcase the rich history of Montreal. They abound with collections portraying its many cultures, from the First Nations to the French, English, Scottish, Irish, Jewish, Italian, Greek and many other cultural communities. The City must take advantage of this rich heritage, which contributes to its national and international reputation and influence.

Given its geographic location, its history and world-renowned culture, the ongoing participation by different levels of government and the increasing role played by the private sector, Montreal must do more to make all its museums known, to invest in its heritage and contribute to sharing its collections.

Montreal, a city of knowledge; museums, houses of knowledge

Aside from their role as keepers of our heritage, museums are houses of knowledge, given their vast collections and the unique and constantly renewed expertise of internationally renowned museologists and curators celebrated for their enthusiasm, creativity and daring.

Over the years, Montreal has become a true city of knowledge, boasting four well-known universities (McGill, Université de Montréal, Concordia and Université du Québec à Montréal) and many research centres in the fields of science, architecture, archaeology and new technologies. Its museums are also houses of knowledge, which will play a key role in education and research in the coming years.

Through their educational mandates, museums contribute to teaching in schools, colleges and universities. Museums are inclusive, accessible to visitors of all ages; they use diverse means of communication (guided tours, workshops, media libraries and traditional libraries, etc.); and they offer activities year-round for all comers, regardless of their level of education. There are no selection criteria imposed at the door, no diplomas to hand out.

This educational role and the sharing of research findings also applies among museum curators and researchers (historians, art historians, archaeologists, scientists, sociologists, etc.) and among visitors and volunteers, committed citizens who give of their time in so many ways (welcoming visitors, taking part in fund-raising activities, guided tours, educational or creative workshops, helping with archives, organizing benefit evenings and so on).

Museums are open places, bringing together experts and amateurs, laypeople interested in learning more about Montreal, its artistic and scientific riches and its world heritage treasures.

Despite the rising attendance figures for museums, there is still much to be done, particularly to appeal to those people who visit museums rarely or not at all. It is because they are inaccessible? Too costly? Or were these individuals not introduced to museums as children? Montreal's museums have tremendous potential to develop new audiences. Thus it is all the more important that they be accessible to all segments of the public, from the richest to the poorest, where education, as everyone knows, remains a key factor. This is an immense challenge.

A museum cannot take the place of a school, college or university. But it offers another way of learning, appealing to visitors' intellect and minds as well as their senses, sensations and emotions. The City of Montreal must associate its government partners with this approach and provide adequate funding, so as to contribute to enriching the learning experience and the variety of educational activities available. It is essential to understand that the programs offered by museums and the sharing of knowledge in the area of heritage, art and science, through meetings, lectures and exhibitions, for example, inevitably have an impact on all cultural life in Montreal and help to make Montrealers involved, curious and thinking citizens.

Museums, cultural crossroads

Montreal has grown as waves of immigrants arrived. Even today, it is the main destination for immigrants to Quebec, and one of the major poles in Canada, after Vancouver and Toronto. The presence of new arrivals, with their own languages and cultures, makes this a unique city in Quebec and all of Canada, enjoying international visibility in Europe, the Americas and Asia.

Immigrants have always shaped certain neighbourhoods of Montreal, and continue to do so. Just think of Mile End, Côte-des-Neiges and, more recently, Centre-Sud. Montreal's museums, in their neighbourhood or borough, help newcomers to integrate. By inviting them to discover the history of Montreal and its cultural keystones through a variety of collections, museums bring them together with other Montrealers. They are receptive to cultural differences, and ready to learn from other communities.

Since Montreal takes its multi-ethnic character into account in drawing up many of its social and economic development policies, it must also be

able to help its museums to better understand and highlight the wealth of this diverse cultural mix. Montreal is a city in motion, an open city, just as its museums are open to the world.

Museums do their best to contribute to integrating immigrants. By helping to strengthen the links between museums and their neighbourhoods or boroughs, the City will help Montrealers of all origins to see themselves reflected in their museums.

In co-operation with the different Montreal communities, museums may decide to include objects in their collections illustrating the multicultural face of their City. In so doing they will encourage meetings between different generations of immigrants—those who have already put down roots in Montreal and new arrivals.

DECLARATION BY MONTREAL'S MUSEUMS

In view of the above points, Montreal's museums declare that:

1. All of Montreal's museums are essential to the cultural life of the city.
2. Montreal's heritage and the quality of the urban environment are enriched by the role that museums play in the cityscape, thanks to their extensive property holdings throughout the city.
3. Funding for museums is a lasting investment that benefits all Montrealers. While the market determines success in the private sector, the same is not true for museums, for which success is not measured solely in terms of short-term profitability.
4. Museums are a major tourist and cultural attraction for the city. Thanks to their rich collections and high-quality facilities, they contribute to Montreal's national and international profile and its historic and urban heritage.
5. Museums change societies. They innovate, spark dialogue, question ideologies, and play a unique and essential creative and educational role.
6. Montreal must encourage access to museums for all its citizens, so as to enrich their quality of urban life.
7. The City of Montreal must be able to intervene effectively and rapidly when it comes to preserving heritage and collections. It must make arrangements with the provincial and federal governments, in particular concerning acquisition and preservation policies.
 - There is little or no concern given to protecting buildings and furnishings, particularly contemporary ones from the 20th century;
 - Waves of fast-paced renovation have resulted in the disappearance of some of our built heritage. The situation would probably have been even more disastrous were it not for the intervention of lobby groups and concerned citizens to save some jewels of Montreal's heritage;
 - The City of Montreal still offers too few incentives to owners of heritage buildings and private collections.
8. Montreal's museums must pursue and expand on existing collaborative ventures with different stakeholders in the school, college and university communities. Whereas museums were once elitist institutions, today they must be seen for what they are: places where people come to reflect and enjoy themselves, open to everyone and to all disciplines, from art to history, science and more. They act as crossroads, a response to the recent focus on super-specialization of knowledge, offering a vast range of collections and experiences.
9. It is important to develop new strategies to increase public awareness of heritage and culture, so as to reach as many Montrealers as possible and encourage them to visit their museums. Similarly, it is vital to make Montrealers understand the importance of preserving their heritage and private collections (from prehistory to the present day, and in all fields, from industry to economics, etc.).
10. Finally, elected municipal representatives must be more present and show greater commitment; at the same time other municipal officials, for instance urban planners, building inspectors, managers of cultural projects, co-ordinators of the facilities concerned, must also be encouraged and their participation recognized. Museums are not private preserves—they concern each and every one of us. Municipal councillors, by being involved and visible and showing their interest in culture, can help all Montrealers better understand the role of museums in their city's cultural life.

PART II

Toward a New Partnership Between the City of Montreal and Its Museums

Contributions and commitments by Montreal's museums

Montreal's museums make tangible contributions to many aspects of life in Montreal.

From an economic point of view, the following figures are very eloquent:¹

- close to 4.5 million visitors a year (individuals and organized groups);
- 3,500 direct and indirect jobs, representing total wages of \$91.7 million;
- upwards of \$90.6 million injected into the Montreal economy annually;
- total (direct, indirect and induced) spinoff of nearly \$127.8 million annually.

Two other major contributions by Montreal's museums must also be mentioned:

1. Montreal Museums Day, every spring, allows Montrealers to become visitors in their own city, making discoveries along a number of routes leading from one museum to another.

This special day gives museums exceptional visibility (with over 90,000 visitors on that day in 2002 alone) and is a tribute to the successful collaboration of Montreal's museums in an effort to make their collections accessible to the widest possible audience. The presence of elected municipal officials at this "cultural festival" should become a tradition.

2. The Museum Collections Centre, created by the Board of Montreal Museum Directors, attest to the concerted efforts by museums to pool their ideas and resources so as to further their mandate of protecting and conserving their collections. The Centre, to officially open in spring 2003, will make it possible to store collections from a dozen Montreal museums and the City of Montreal itself, in complete safety and under controlled environmental conditions. Now that the expertise needed to create the Centre has been brought together, it is important to take this project farther, firstly so that all of Montreal's museums can benefit from it in keeping with their respective needs, and secondly, to keep Montreal's heritage and collections here where they belong.

¹Source: Locus Loisir et Culture inc., *Étude sur les retombées culturelles, économiques, touristiques sociales et communautaires des musées montréalais*, March 1999.

Commitments

The role played by Montreal's museums in the city's economic and cultural life underlies their commitments for the coming years.

The participants in the Estates-General have made the following commitments:

- Montreal's museums, regardless of their size, themes and approach (heritage, historical, contemporary, thematic, artistic or scientific), must make an active and decidedly modern contribution to Montrealers' quality of life;
- Museums are places of knowledge, essential for safeguarding Montreal's culture and heritage, places that must be supported and promoted through acquisitions and conservation, research and outreach activities;
- Museums must be democratic places where people can think and express themselves freely;
- The new City of Montreal must view access to quality museum services as a priority;
- Museums must be and remain public places, open to all, without distinction as to origin, social status, political opinions, religious practices or other criteria;
- A route through the city linking Montreal's museums must be established, making it possible to integrate, unify and strengthen the bonds between the different museums in Montreal;
- The educational role of museums must be better recognized, and the cultural policy of the new City of Montreal must take account of the major role that museums play in this regard;
- Museums must receive government recognition of the complementary role they play in citizens' learning process, by giving them access to scientific and artistic knowledge;
- Their research and education work must be continued and developed in co-operation with educational and community authorities and teaching and research institutions.

Six possible areas for action

Whereas Montreal's museums:

- have long been involved in developing and promoting the city's heritage and collections;
- have a significant impact on the quality of Montrealers' lives, through their roles as cultural and urban creators, mediators and reference points;
- are crossroads that transcend differences;
- have been supported for a number of years by the City, which has recognized their importance by creating municipal and para-municipal organizations, establishing a municipal heritage, allocating or loaning heritage and other properties, approving grant programs and other tools managed by its departments;
- nonetheless suffer from the lack of medium- and long-term vision on the part of the City and from insufficient municipal funding;

we, the participants in the Estates-General on Montreal's museums, feel it necessary to clearly state our demands to the advisory committee now drawing up a cultural policy for the new City of Montreal. It is important that:

- a. the City recognize the specific role of museums in cultural development;
- b. Montreal's museums be consulted not only when the cultural policy is prepared but also when following up on its application;
- c. the City support and develop a municipal and metropolitan museum network and recognize that its responsibilities include conservation, research, and sharing information on heritage and collections, along with basic services for residents;
- d. representatives of museums and the Board of Montreal Museum Directors be invited to sit on or participate in the different committees and organizations related to the City's cultural policy, for any matters concerning heritage or related fields implicitly linked to the role of Montreal's museums (tourism, urban design and architecture, renewal of a district or neighbourhood, preserving heritage or collections, acquisitions, etc.);
- e. a museum advisory committee be set up to inform and advise the City's Cultural development department or any other municipal cultural or heritage body or any body acting through an agreement between different levels of government;
- f. in collaboration with the Board of Montreal Museum Directors and the Quebec Department of Culture and Communications, a status report be prepared as soon as possible on the existing Montreal museum network, collections and heritage and its outreach activities, so as to identify its strengths and weaknesses and design a development plan that allows access to heritage and collections for all Montrealers, either through existing institutions or by giving them access to other venues suited to museum activities;
- g. the City co-ordinate its cultural policy on museums with those of other public authorities.

These demands can be broken down into six areas, in which museums can most certainly play an even more active role:

1. HERITAGE

- The City must set up a "heritage watch" network in co-operation with the Board of Montreal Museum Directors, to identify Montreal heritage treasures, of both local and international interest, and to make sure that they are adequately housed in appropriate facilities;
- Within its own jurisdiction, the City must encourage and facilitate the acquisition of Montreal heritage pieces or collections;
- The City must encourage links between museums and cultural institutions for which it is responsible (libraries, archives, maisons de la culture and so on) to constitute and share Montreal's heritage.

2. URBAN PLANNING

- The City must involve museums in consultations and actions with an impact on the urban environment and the quality of Montrealers' lives (streetscapes, renewal of neighbourhoods, urban furniture, architecture, etc.).

3. EDUCATION

- The City must encourage permanent links between educational partners in Greater Montreal (Montreal School Board, Department of Education) and museums;
- The City, in its initiatives or with public-sector partners, must promote access to museums for schoolchildren (travelling exhibitions, transportation, special museum rates offered by the Société de transport de Montréal);
- The City and its museums must set a clear goal of reaching more Montreal schoolchildren within the next five years;
- The City must encourage co-ordination between its Recreation and community development department and Montreal's museums;
- The City must support the establishment of multi-purpose areas in museums for handling school groups as part of museum tours and art, technology and heritage activities.

4. PROMOTION

- The City must use the communication tools and public facilities at its disposal (Accès Montréal, public libraries, borough offices, Website, etc.) to make Montreal's museums better known;
- The City must include the museum network when promoting its assets and in visits by dignitaries.

5. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- The City must recognize the importance of its museums in establishing international relations, and encourage the development of cultural links and exchanges between museums of all sizes with the museum networks of its twinned cities, with the clear support of the departments concerned (International affairs, etc.).

6. FUNDING

- The City must take a close look at its support for Montreal's museums so as to specify, structure and reinforce its support for them (taxes, property management, subsidy programs, mandate of the Arts Council, etc.) and establish development guidelines;
- The City must renew its joint programs with the Department of Culture and Communications to promote exhibitions and publications, and give the Arts Council more resources to assist with travelling exhibitions, not only on art, but also on history, architecture, heritage, scientific and technical literacy, etc.
- The City must work to establish collaboration among Montreal's major festivals (Montreal Jazz Festival, Just for Laughs Festival, World Film Festival, etc.), their sponsors, and museums;
- The City must establish joint agreements with public partners involved in education, as exemplified in the Agreement between the Department of Culture and Communications and the City, to allow museums to increase awareness of heritage and culture in the Montreal school community;
- Finally, the City of Montreal, in close partnership with the department responsible for Greater Montreal, must strengthen its leadership role in matters relating to Montreal's museums.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to salute and thank all those who contributed to the success of the Estates-General on Montreal's museums and helped in preparing this study, *Montreal, A City, Its Museums*. It lays out the many vital issues and options to be addressed if we are to support and develop a thriving museum culture in Montreal.

*This report was prepared by Bernard Chassé and Laurent Lapierre.
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April 2003*

Members of the Board of Montreal Museum Directors

Canadian Centre for Architecture
 Centre d'histoire de Montréal
 Château Dufresne Museum
 Château Ramezay Museum
 Cinémathèque québécoise
 Écomusée du fier monde
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 Just for Laughs Museum
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 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
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 Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal
 Musée de Lachine
 Musée des Hospitalières de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal
 Musée des maîtres et artisans du Québec (formerly the Musée d'art de Saint-Laurent)
 Musée Marc-Aurèle-Fortin
 Musée Marguerite-Bourgeoys
 Pointe-à-Callière, Montréal Museum of Archaeology and History
 Redpath Museum
 Sir Georges-Étienne Cartier National Historic Site of Canada
 Stewart Hall Art Gallery
 Stewart Museum at the Fort on Île Sainte-Hélène
 The Fur Trade at Lachine National Historic Site of Canada

Estates-General on Montreal's museums

March 5, 6 and 7, 2003

An event organized by
the Board of Montreal Museum Directors

In co-operation with:

Société des musées québécois
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THE BOARD OF MONTREAL MUSEUM DIRECTORS WISHES TO THANK THE PARTNERS OF THE ESTATES-GENERAL ON MONTREAL'S MUSEUMS



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