

**C E N T R E  
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DE MONTRÉAL**

*From the series « Mapping the Automatists in Montreal », #119*

**Presence of the Automatists at  
Monument National  
1182, St-Laurent Boulevard**

Claude Gosselin, C.M., January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022

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**About Monument National.**

The Monument National is a theater built between 1891 and 1893. It was designed by the architects Maurice Perrault, Albert Mesnard and Joseph Venne. Inaugurated on June 24, 1893, it is located on St. Lawrence Boulevard, the artery that separates the City of Montreal between the east and west sides, the French-speaking city to the east, the English-speaking city to the west. With its imposing dimensions and neo-Renaissance architecture, this performance hall was established by the Association Saint-Jean-Baptiste, now the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, founded by Ludger Duvernay in 1834. Initially an administrative and cultural center, it quickly became the place for artistic diffusion in Quebec. Shows were presented in French, English and Yiddish.



**Monument National, 1182 St-Laurent Boulevard in Montreal. Architects : Maurice Perrault, Albert Mesnard et Joseph Venne. Photo : Ville de Montréal**

The first groups of "French Canadian women" worked at and developed for their emancipation in all areas of daily life at Monument National. It was here that the "Monument's public courses" in art, history, literature and many other school subjects were inaugurated in 1895. It was at the Monument National that several theatre companies performed in the theatre, such as the Montreal Repertory Theater, the Équipe and the Arcade, between 1936 and 1952. It is interesting to note that Julienne Saint-Mars-Gauvreau, the mother of Pierre and Claude Gauvreau, worked at the box office of the Montreal Repertory Theater at the Monument National.

### About the Automatists who had a presence at Monument National.

**Muriel Guilbault** first caught our attention. Very young, at only 15 years old, she is admitted to the Montreal Repertory Theater. Self-taught, her talents impressed. She played in several plays and from 1938 to 1946, she was in the humoristic revue *Les Fridolinades* by Gratien Gélinas.

In early 1940, **Françoise Sullivan**, **Pierre Gauvreau** and **Bruno Cormier** were at the Monument National. It was **Françoise Sullivan** who invited her friends **Pierre** and **Bruno** to participate in a choreography commissioned by Alice Szata, a friend of her mother's whom she already knew, to fill in the time during a change of scenery for a children's show. Françoise already had experience in dancing, having taken classes with Gérald Crevier. She taught Pierre and Bruno. Gérald Crevier was happy to incorporate the boys into his classes to dance the Sylphides with the young girls. The three of them loved dance and practiced it among themselves. Françoise created a choreography entitled *Colombine, Arlequin and Pierrot*, Commedia dell'Arte style. **Françoise** was Colombine, **Pierre Gauvreau**: Arlequin and **Bruno Cormier**: Pierrot. She used the music *Petrushka* by Igor Stravinsky.

The three friends were around the same age: Pierre Gauvreau was 18, Françoise Sullivan 17 and Bruno Cormier 21. They had known each other for a few years: **Françoise Sullivan** was introduced to the brothers Pierre and Claude Gauvreau by her childhood friend, Alice Guimond, when they were both students at the Académie Saint-Urbain. Alice's parents lived in a house next door to the Gauvreau's on what is now Terrasse St-Denis. All the teenagers, aged between 12 and 15 years old, played together.

As for **Bruno Cormier** and **Pierre Gauvreau**, they met at Collège Sainte-Marie, during their studies, starting in 1934-35, six years ago. Living not far from each other, the Gauvreau's now at 75 Sherbrooke Street West, they regularly walked together between their homes and the College. Finally, it should be noted that at the time of their performance at the Monument National, **Pierre Gauvreau** was a student at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal and that **Françoise Sullivan** would join him the following year.

Finally, it is because to the presence of these three friends at the Monument National that **Muriel Guilbault** joined the automatist artists. It was **Pierre Gauvreau** who approached her while she was playing in *Les Fridolinades* by Gratien Gélinas. **Muriel Guilbault** would later become **Claude Gauvreau**'s muse.



Gratien Gélinas and Muriel Guilbault in the play «Tit-coq» in 1948. Photo : Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Two other appearances of Muriel Guilbault at the Monument were remarkable:

- September 30, 1943, she played in *Tessa* by Jean Giraudoux produced by the theater company Équipe and directed by Jean-Pierre Dagenais. She played alongside Janine Sutto. This theater company specialized in a poetic repertoire of French drama plays.

- May 22, 1948, she played the role of Marie-Ange in *Ti-Coq*, first play by Gratien Gélinas who created the role for her. The play was performed at the Monument National in May and June 1948 and was revived at the Théâtre Gésu in October of the same year. In total, it was performed 542 times between May 1948 and June 1949. Muriel Guilbault received many favorable reviews.

We only include the plays presented at the Monument National and in which **Muriel Guilbault** acted. She has played in many other productions in the theater and on the radio.

Unfortunately, on January 3, 1952, **Muriel Guilbault**, who had had a difficult existence, put an end to her life.

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