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From the series "Mapping the Automatists in Montreal", #103

Muriel Guilbault's Residence
374, Sherbrooke Street West, apt. 1

"INCONSCIENT ET PEINTURE"
FORUMS HOSTED BY PAUL-ÉMILE BORDUAS

"MOUSSEAU-RIOPELLE" EXHIBITION

Claude Gosselin, C.M., August 7th, 2020

Several activities organised by members of the Automatists group took place at the residence of Muriel Guilbault and her husband, Julien Major, an infantry lieutenant in the Canadian army and union activist. They had married in February 1944 and moved into a large apartment at 374 Sherbrooke Street West.

Muriel Guilbault was an actress. She met several members of the group in 1944, but it was not until 1946 that Pierre Gauvreau formally invited her to join the group. She made her apartment available to her friends who held forums and exhibitions there. The apartment could accommodate around 40 people.

Muriel Guilbault played in *Huis clos* by Jean-Paul Sartre. Presented at the Gesù from January 27 to February 3, 1946, the play was produced by the Équipe theater company under Pierre Dagenais' direction. Muriel played the role of Estelle. On March 10, Jean-Paul Sartre, who was passing through Montreal, gave a conference on underground literature entitled "La littérature française de 1941 à 1945: la littérature clandestine". He was informed that his play had been performed the previous month. He asked to see a private performance. Impressed by the actress, he offered her to perform in the play in Paris. She declined the invitation. The following year, she played Claude Gauvreau's *Bien-être* at Congress Hall, May 20, 1947. (Yvan Cloutier, *Sartre au Québec (1945-1954)*, thesis, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, 1988.)

"MOUSSEAU-RIOPELLE"

Jean-Paul Mousseau and Jean Paul Riopelle exhibition

From November 29 to December 14, 1947

Entitled "Mousseau-Riopelle", the exhibition showcased their works on paper: drawings by Mousseau and watercolors by Riopelle. Claude Gauvreau described the exhibition:

"It is in Muriel's vast apartment, on Sherbrooke Street, near the Swiss Hutt [this café-bar was located at 394 Sherbrooke Street West, and served as a meeting place for the Automatists Marcel Barbeau, Marcelle Ferron, Muriel Guilbault, Jean-Paul Mousseau, as well as their friends Robert Blair, Jean Le Fébure, Dyne Mouso, Ulysse Comtois, Rita Letendre] that the very beautiful Mousseau-Riopelle exhibition took place, shortly before the drafting of the manifesto "Refus global". The artists had initially decided to design their exhibition in a spirit of subversion, and their invitation card, imitating a funeral announcement, had a decidedly dadaic twist. Muriel hoped that all taboos would be broken, but she was a little disappointed that the provocation ended up being limited to the invitation. However, if we compare this exhibition to the cheerful and reassuring exhibitions held in today's solemn non-figurative art galleries, we must admit that it was not trivial; Riopelle and Mousseau had introduced a spit wall into the vast apartment and it was on this spit that the works were hung. Aesthetically, one could not overlook the fact that the displayed objects appeared very subversive to most visitors."

Claude Gauvreau, "L'épopée automatiste vue par un cyclope", *La Barre du Jour*, no. 17-20, January-August 1969, p. 69-70.

"AUTOMATISME ET PEINTURE"

Forum hosted by Paul-Émile Borduas and Jean Paul Riopelle

December 11, 1947 at 8:30 p.m.

"We had a forum one evening during the exhibition of the two Jean-Pauls [Thursday, December 11, 1947, Jean-Paul Mousseau and Jean Paul Riopelle]. A second is to take place next Thursday [Thursday January 8, 1948: there is no confirmation that this forum took place; the next one was held on Thursday February 26, 1948]. You would be delighted with the gradual transformation of the questions. This is, I believe, a real grassroot action. The exhibitions seem destined to become a starting point of this passionate contact."

Paul-Émile Borduas, "Lettre à Fernand Leduc", January 6, 1948, *Vers les îles de lumière*, p. 241.

"The painters Jean Paul Riopelle and Jean-Paul Mousseau are currently exhibiting paintings, watercolors and drawings at 374 West of Sherbrooke Street. They had invited anyone who was interested to ask them questions last night. About fifty people showed up to hear about the theory of 'automatism' in painting. Most of

the questions were answered by Mr. Paul-Émile Borduas, painter and teacher. Mr. Mousseau, present, did not intervene in the debate [...] The debate lasted more than two hours."

La Presse, December 12, 1947, p. 21. [Anonymous], "Automatisme et peinture, M. Paul-Émile Borduas expose ses théories sur la création artistique".

"INCONSCIENT ET PEINTURE"

Forum hosted by Paul-Émile Borduas, February 26, 1948

UNCONSCIOUS AND PAINTING

Exchange of views between psychology students and Mr. Borduas.

"Yesterday evening [Thursday, February 26, 1948] a new debate took place on automatism in painting, in Apartment 1 at 374 West, Sherbrooke Street. As in the previous one, it was Mr. Paul-Émile Borduas who gave most of the conference. Here is a report inevitably incomplete, because the main speaker and his interlocutors touched upon the most diverse subjects.

An assistant asked Mr. Borduas to define automatism. The speaker replied that 'automatic writing is that which is done under the dictation of the unconscious, without the control of reason'. The auditor insists on obtaining a definition of automatism. Mr. Borduas replies that definitions and abstractions mean nothing to him, that he does not separate ideas from objects.

What is the unconscious, the subconscious?

Some listeners compare automatism with surrealism and expressionism; one wonders what distinguishes the works and theories of these schools. The debate returns to the unconscious; psychology students participate; but failing to agree on the definition of the unconscious, the subconscious, no conclusion is reached..."

La Presse, February 27, 1948, p. 4. [Anonymous], "Inconscient et peinture. Échange de vues entre des étudiants en psychologie et M. Borduas".

<http://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/2877258>

Coup d'œil

"There was a forum last Thursday evening [February 26, 1948] at No. 374 Sherbrooke West. It was held by the group of Automatist Painters both to define their position and to convince the unbelievers. The cenacle brought together about forty listeners in a tight, intimate, very dark, very simple, very neo-intellectual setting, like an attractive trompe-l'oeil intended to create an atmosphere. Its pleasant success did not, however, prevent anyone from asking trick questions. Paul-Émile Borduas, responding for his group, willingly answered the interrogations with a patient good grace. Nonetheless, the result remains nothing less than convincing. We touched upon everything without going into

much detail: surrealism, Marxism, psychoanalysis; Allport, Kandinski, Meitzinger, Picasso and Freud were invoked; we wanted to establish a definition of automatism, based on arguments for which the terminology is much more based on clinical psychology than art. Forms and colors, the existence of the soul and the principles of criticism were discussed. The same questions paraphrased several times often elicited different answers, sometimes diametrically opposed. Thus, after having declared 'that automatic painting is the plastic expression of the unconscious where reason cannot and must have no part', Mr. Borduas explained to us gravely that 'the choice of colors depends solely on what the painter wants to express'. Choice and will imply reasoning, therefore eliminating the unforeseen and unconscious element. Such inconsistencies make automatism in painting an amusing trifle: we conclude, for our part, that it is to art what certain board games are to psychoanalysis. The adversarial assembly ended of its own accord for lack of suggesting anything else."

Le Devoir, March 3, 1948, p. 5, Renée Normand, "Coups d'œil".

http://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/2780713?doc_searchtext=Le%20Devoir%203%20mars%201948

Françoise Sullivan: "It was during the forum of February 26, 1948 that Jean Paul Riopelle asked me to meet him at his home the next day to carry out the 'Hiver' part of the 'Chorégraphie des quatre saisons' project, in Otterburn Park where he lived with Françoise L'Espérance-Riopelle. I went there on the 27th and the choreography was filmed on the 28th by Riopelle; it was entitled 'Danse dans la neige'" [FS to CG, July 4, 2020].

Françoise's mother had already filmed the "Été" season on the beach at Les Escoumins in June 1947, but the film was unfortunately lost. The film on the "Hiver" season would have the same fate. Fortunately, Maurice Perron witnessed the dance at Otterburn Park and took some wonderful photos of the event.

Translation by Vincent Godin-Filion, proofreading by Dominique Robb.

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