

**C E N T R E  
INTERNATIONAL  
D ' A R T  
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DE MONTRÉAL**

*From the series "Mapping the Automatists in Montreal", #110*

**67, Sainte-Catherine Street West,  
At the Librairie Tranquille:  
Automatists Exhibitions and  
The Launch of *Refus global***

Claude Gosselin, C.M., July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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In 1938, Henri Tranquille founded a bookstore named "Librairie Tranquille" from his own book collection, on Ontario Street. In 1948, it moved to 67, Sainte-Catherine Street West. Very quickly, it became an important place for artists and culture-loving intellectuals. Henri Tranquille sold new and used books, magazines, and school textbooks. On the shelves were popular and specialized works, both Quebecois and French, as well as books blacklisted by the then all-powerful Catholic Church in Quebec. In 1974, when the rent became too expensive, Henri Tranquille moved his bookstore to 4511, Saint-Denis Street, then to 434, Mont-Royal Avenue East. Having lost an important part of its clientele during the moves, the bookstore closed down in 1975 (Hélène Sicotte, "Un état de la diffusion des arts visuels à Montréal", *The Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art canadienne*, vol. XVI, no. 1, p. 73; and Odile Tremblay, "Libraire un jour... La révolution Tranquille", *Le Devoir*, January 25, 1992, p. C-14).



Librairie Tranquille. Photo: Henri Tranquille Collection, University of Sherbrooke.

## The *Refus global* manifesto

Jean-Paul Mousseau was employed at the bookstore as an assistant bookseller. He oversaw the book displays in the windows and the exhibitions' setup. He suggested the bookstore be used for the launch of the *Refus global* manifesto, which took place on August 9, 1948. The manifesto was published by Éditions Mithra-Mythe, a publishing house created by Maurice Perron and whose name was chosen by Claude Gauvreau. 400 numbered copies were printed and signed by (in alphabetical order) Magdeleine Arbour, Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Bruno Cormier, Marcelle Ferron-Hamelin, Claude Gauvreau, Pierre Gauvreau, Muriel Guilbault, Fernand Leduc, Françoise Lespérance-Riopelle, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Maurice Perron, Louise Renaud, Thérèse Renaud-Leduc, Jean Paul Riopelle, and Françoise Sullivan.

The manifesto included a total of 10 texts and a work by Jean Paul Riopelle. Three are by Paul-Émile Borduas: "*Refus global*", "*Commentaires sur des mots courants*" and "*En regard du surréalisme actuel*"; four by Claude Gauvreau: "*Bien-être*", "*Au cœur des quenouilles*", "*L'ombre sur le cerveau*" and "*Raie fugue lobe ale*", the latter being included in the cover of the manifesto designed by Jean Paul Riopelle; a text by each of the following signatories: Bruno Cormier "*L'œuvre picturale est une expérience*"; Françoise Sullivan "*La danse et l'espoir*"; Fernand Leduc "*Qu'on le veuille ou non*".

The *Refus global* signatories demanded an end to obscurantism, conservatism, and conformism in Quebec society of the late 1940s by drawing from all forms of artistic expression. Their commitment testified to their deep desire to change the aesthetic references enforced at that time as well as to transform the individual and society through painting, photography, poetry, theater, and dance. *Refus global* questioned Catholic and conservative values, and claimed a new aesthetic inspired by the avant-garde and modernism. It defended the liberation of the individual from the stifling social stranglehold.

For the young men in the group, signing the manifesto was not a problem. For the young women, on the other hand, the situation was different: "We are in 1948, a time which recognizes little autonomy for women. A single woman, of age and earning a living – which is still rare – remains under the moral guardianship of her family. Married, she must submit to the authority of her husband! ... Magdeleine Arbour and Françoise Sullivan therefore had to face their families: Magdeleine, summoned by her mother to the living room one evening after dinner, finds herself facing a family council in tears at the shame she brought to her household. [...] Françoise also signs out of conviction, but she does not brag about it to her family. [...] Jeanne Renaud, unlike her older sisters, must refrain from signing the manifesto. She is not of age and her signature, which would endorse a teacher's text, could lead to a charge of misappropriation of a minor against Borduas" (Biondi, Jeannette. *Le jeune homme en colère. Biographie de Pierre Gauvreau*, Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 2003, p. 133-134).

## Automatists exhibitions at the Librairie Tranquille

Jean-Paul Mousseau showcased 15 gouaches from November 3 to 18, 1948; Marcelle Ferron presented her works there from January 15 to 30, 1949. (Biondi, Jeanette, *Le jeune homme en colère. Biographie de Pierre Gauvreau*, Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 2003, p. 133-134.)



Exhibition opening at the Librairie Tranquille, August 31, 1948. Photo: Henri Tranquille Collection, University of Sherbrooke.

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