

**C E N T R E
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From the series "Mapping the Automatists in Montreal", #112

**Maison Birks
620, Sainte-Catherine Street West
Magdeleine Arbour**

Claude Gosselin, C.M., July 15th, 2020

Maison Birks is a jewelry store founded in 1879 by Henry Birks. First located on St-Jacques Street in Old Montreal, it moved to Square Phillips in 1894. The building was designed by Canadian architect Edward Maxwell. Maxwell is also responsible for the buildings of the Unitarian Church of the Messiah and the Michal and Renata Hornstein pavilion at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Modifications were made to the building three times (1902-1906, 1931, 2017-2018).



Maison Birks, Sainte-Catherine Street. Architect: Edward Maxwell. Photo: BANQ.

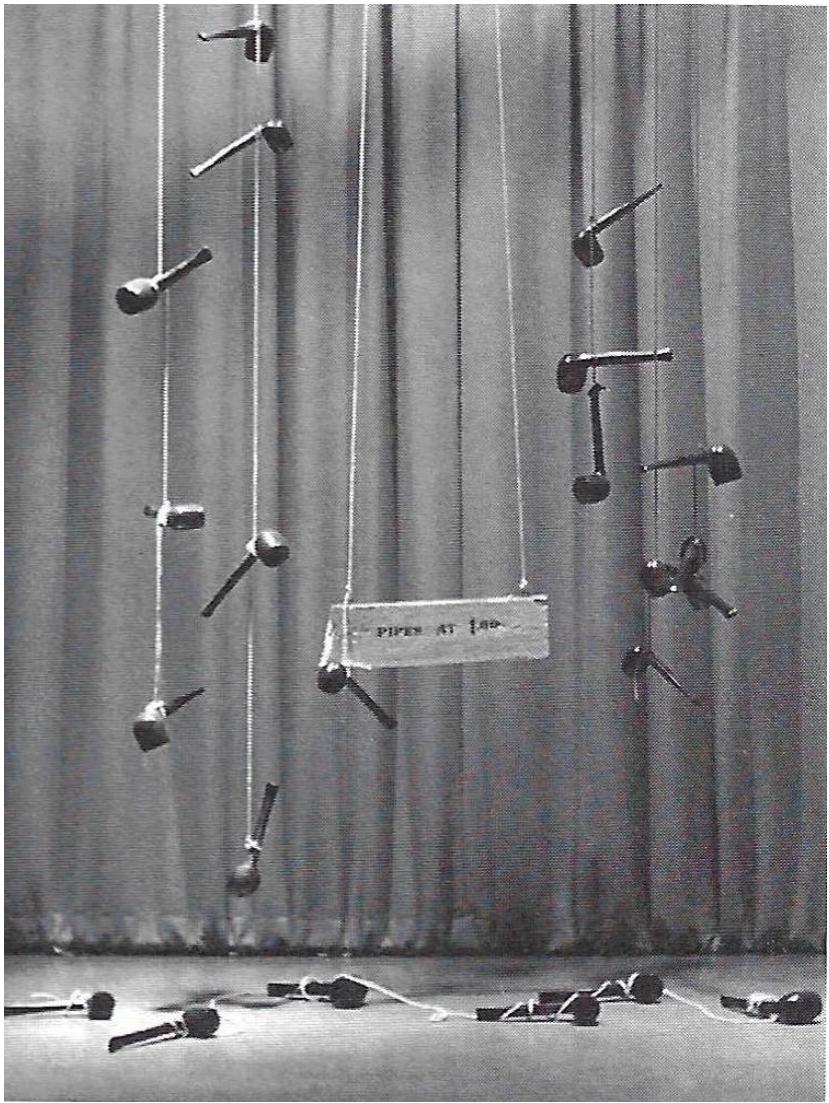
Magdeleine Arbour was hired there as a saleswoman in 1938. She was 15 years old and discovered a talent for jewelry display in the store's display windows. She became the store's window designer two years later. She remained there until 1952, that is, for 15 years. She left the store to work at Société Radio-Canada.

At Birks, she used "poor" materials such as sea polished wood, sand, shells, ropes, paper with which she created small inventive *tableaux*. Its windows quickly became popular; curious passers-by stopped to observe them. People talked about them all over town.

At Société Radio-Canada, she was set designer for several television shows, such as the 1959 children's series *La Boîte à surprises*, for which she was also the host.

Magdeleine Arbour and Pierre Gauvreau married on June 18, 1949 at the Church of the Messiah.

Note: Magdeleine eventually dropped the "g" in her first name, but the exact time is unknown.



Magdeleine Arbour, window display at Maison Birks, 1946.

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

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