

## What future for a symbol of Expo 67 ?



PHOTO OLIVIER JEAN, LA PRESSE

The former Musée d'Art d'Expo 67 housed the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal from 1968 to 1992.



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**If you take Pierre-Dupuy Avenue from the Cité du Havre in Montreal, you'll notice on your right a curious building located on a raised plot. It's hidden behind mature trees and nature that has reclaimed its rights. The place is sinister and expresses abandonment.**

Published Saturday April 12, 2025.

Translated by Mathis Martel.

This is where the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art was located between 1968 and 1992 before it moved near Place des Arts. Those who are older or more knowledgeable probably know that this brutalist-style building was the Expo 67 Art Museum (or the Creative Genius of Man pavilion). During that famous summer, when everyone had "their beautiful passport with their beautiful photo," thousands of visitors were able to admire masterpieces from all over the world.



PHOTO PAUL-HENRI TALBOT, LA PRESSE ARCHIVES  
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, in 1974

This building, designed by Paul Gauthier, Gilles Guité, and Gilles Côté, who, with Jean-Marie Roy, would go on to create one of Quebec's most prominent architectural firms, is now owned by Casiloc Inc., the real estate subsidiary of the Société des casinos du Québec. The premises were long used for equipment storage.

Today, one man dreams of reviving this place and restoring its original purpose. This man is Claude Gosselin, executive and artistic director of the International Centre for Contemporary Art (CIAC). Over the past few months, he has launched a project that, by Jove, is truly inspiring.



PHOTO OLIVIER JEAN, LA PRESSE

Claude Gosselin, General and Artistic Director, Centre international d'art contemporain

**The idea is to use this building, designed for exhibitions (it is made of blank walls), and to make it a museum dedicated to Les Automatistes.**

The presence of this group of artists would allow for a mix of various art forms (painting, photography, design, dance, etc.). Clearly disappointed to see that Riopelle will have a showcase in Quebec City and not in Montreal, the city where he was born, Claude Gosselin would also like to dedicate an entire room to the painter.

Other sections would house the CIAC and a documentation center on Les Automatistes. Claude Gosselin, inspired by places like Gaudí's Park Güell in Barcelona and the Fondation Vuitton in Paris, would like to create a sculpture garden around the museum, as was the case in 1967. This space would simply be called the Arts Pavilion at Cité-du-Havre.

"I spoke with the directors of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Stéphane Aquin, and the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art, Stéphane La Roche, and both told me they were ready to collaborate," Claude Gosselin told me during a meeting in front of the pavilion. "Several works by Les Automatistes are in storage due to lack of space."

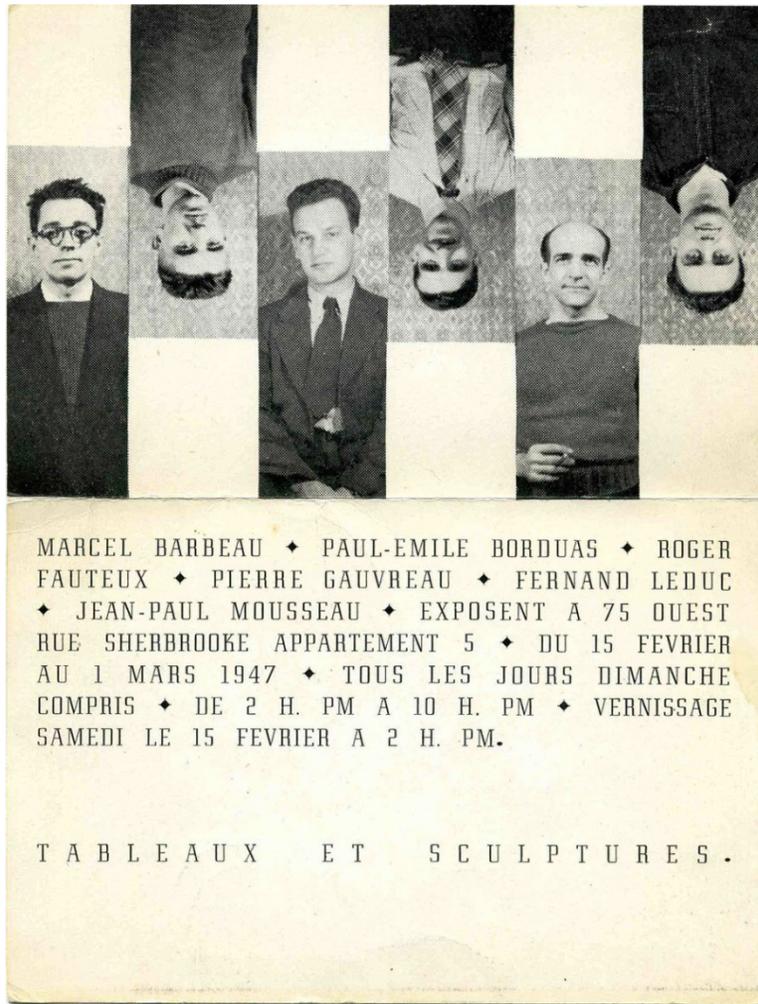


PHOTO LA PRESSE ARCHIVES

A photo from the invitation card for the second exhibition of Quebec Les Automatistes painters, 1947

This project also receives support from artist Françoise Sullivan and the Riopelle Foundation, chaired by the painter's daughter, Yseult, and of which Serge Joyal and Paul Maréchal are members. A document summarizing the entire project has been prepared and will circulate in the coming months. "My first step will be to approach the private sector," says Claude Gosselin. "If I go to the government right away, they'll tell me that the plate is already full. It took a guy from Vancouver [Michael Audain] to create Espace Riopelle in Quebec City; I can't believe we can't find Quebec patrons for a project like this."

Claude Gosselin, who worked at the MAC for three years when it was located in this building, knows the space well and has a very clear vision of its future use. The ground floor would house the reception area, offices, restrooms, a cloakroom, a boutique, and a storage area. Upstairs, the four large 15m x 24m rooms would be used for exhibitions.

What is the state of the former museum today? In November 2023, Eve Seguin, a professor of political science at the Université du Québec à Montréal, and Mathilde Michaud, then a master's candidate in political science also at UQAM, signed a letter in *Le Devoir* in which they stated that a heritage study, carried out in 2006, documented the "advanced decay" of the building and "drawn up a sordid list of modifications perpetrated inside and out."

**Claude Gosselin, who recently visited the premises, stated that the exhibition halls are still in good condition. However, the building still needs to be renovated and redeveloped. The project's initiator estimates the costs associated with this work at between \$5 million and \$10 million.**

It's difficult to know the true intentions of those responsible for this building. Loto-Québec has been sparing with its comments to me. Will it be sold to a developer? Will it remain abandoned for many more years? Will it be able to enjoy a happy future, as Claude Gosselin's project proposes?



PHOTO OLIVIER JEAN, LA PRESSE

Claude Gosselin's project includes a sculpture garden to be laid out around the museum.

In October 2023, Loto-Québec put the building up for sale. This process was suspended at the request of the Société du parc Jean-Drapeau. Then, the building was put up for sale again. A contractor came forward with the intention of demolishing it and building a condo tower in this area called Bridge-Bonaventure, a new El Dorado for real estate developers. Since this purchase proposal, nothing has changed.

Would demolition be possible? When the building was put up for sale, the Ministry of Culture and Communications rejected a request for classification following a decree authorizing Loto-Québec to sell it for over \$10 million.

This refusal was very badly received by heritage defenders. I should point out that this building is one of the eight thematic pavilions of Expo 67 (built by the organizing body) and that it is the only one still existing, along with Habitat 67 (originally designed to house visitors).

To avoid such a fate for the former Expo 67 Art Museum, it will take willpower, determination, and judgment. "I can't believe we're going to revitalize this entire area and not think about putting a cultural venue there," says Claude Gosselin. "That would be a monumental mistake."

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