

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

*From the series "Mapping the Automatists in Montreal", #113*

## Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Originally the Art Gallery,  
Founded by The Art Association of Montreal  
from 1860 to 1949

Part 1

## The Contemporary Art Society

Claude Gosselin, C.M., July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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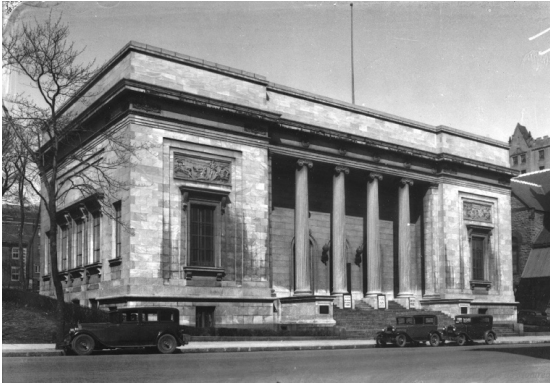
Formerly known as the Art Association of Montreal from 1860 to 1949, the institution was renamed the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) in 1949.

Although inaugurated in 1860, the Art Association of Montreal (AAM) did not have a permanent exhibit space until 1879: the Art Gallery (AG-AAM), located at 23 Square Phillips, was the first building in Canada designed to house an art collection. The Art Gallery moved to 1379 Sherbrooke Street in 1912 in a new "fine arts" style building designed by architects Edward and William Sutherland Maxwell. The inauguration took place on December 9, 1912 in the presence of Governor General Prince Arthur of the United Kingdom.



The Art Gallery of the Art Association of Montreal, at 23 Square Phillips, at the corner of Saint-Catherine Street West and Square Phillips. Built in 1879, the building was demolished in 1948. Architects: John William Hopkins and his son Edward C. Hopkins.

Photo: William Notman, 1893.  
McCord Museum.



The Art Gallery of the Art Association of Montreal, at 1379, Sherbrooke Street West, from 1912 to 1949. Architects: Edward and William S. Maxwell.

Photo: Archives of the City of Montreal, March 26, 1936.

## The Contemporary Art Society (CAS) at the Art Gallery from 1939 to 1948

The Contemporary Art Society (CAS) is an artist association founded by John Lyman and Paul-Émile Borduas in 1939. Paul-Émile Borduas was its first vice-president. The society aimed to increase exhibition opportunities for its members and promote modern / contemporary art in Montreal at a time when academic art dominated. It also tried to break down barriers within the Art Association of Montreal, which ran the Art Gallery, which could be described as "a sort of social and artistic salon mainly reserved for the wealthy English-speaking bourgeoisie of Montreal" (Author's translation. Guy Robert, *L'art au Québec depuis 1940*, Éditions de La Presse, Ottawa, 1973, p. 57).

The Art Gallery (AG-AMM) hosted several CAS exhibitions at which members of the Automatists were present.

1940: Paul-Émile Borduas;

1942: Paul-Émile Borduas;

1946: Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Jean Paul Riopelle;

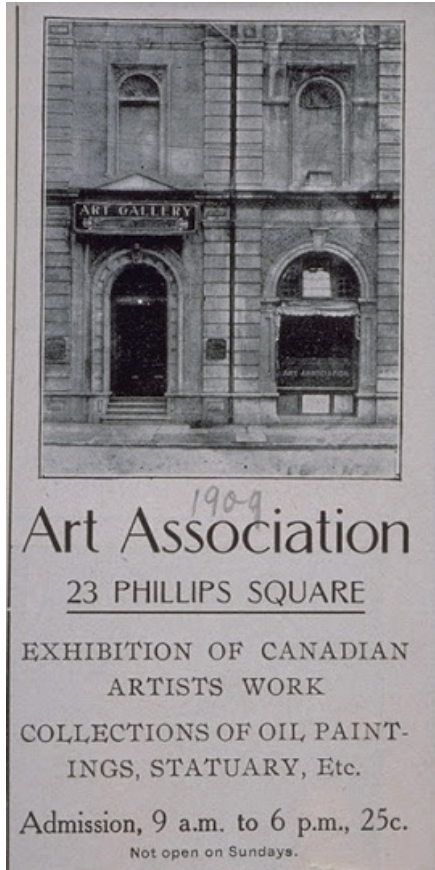
1948, from February 7 to 29: Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, Suzanne Meloche, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Jean Paul Riopelle.

On February 12, during the exhibition, the CAS held a meeting to elect members of its board of directors. Paul-Émile Borduas is elected president. However, he quickly realized that he had failed to rally other members to his ideas. He resigned the next day, February 13, both as president and member. The CAS dissolved soon after. The 1948 exhibition was the association's last.



The Art Gallery of the Art Association of Montreal, at 1379 Sherbrooke Street West. Exhibition room, first floor, circa 1913.

Photo: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Heritage Montreal.



Advertisement for the Art Association at 23  
Square Phillips, 1909. Photo: BAnQ.

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

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