

Chronology

1947

Max and Iris Stern acquire the Dominion Gallery of Fine Arts located on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal and founded by Rose Millman in 1941.

1948

Publication of *Refus Global* (manifesto of the Automatistes), written by Paul-Émile Borduas.

Publication of *Prisme d'yeux* (manifesto of the Plasticiens), written by Rodolphe de Repentigny, alias Jauran.

In March, Sir George Williams College is granted university charter status from the Quebec government, but remains under the trusteeship of the Montreal Y.M.C.A. until 1967. The recognition of this new university makes it possible to receive additional funding, fostering the institution's rapid expansion.

1949

Over the course of the 1950s, Sir George Williams School of Art (a Y.M.C.A. school affiliated with Sir George Williams College) is integrated into Sir George Williams University.

Douglass Burns Clarke invites Leah Sherman to give a workshop as part of the art appreciation course that he taught at Sir George Williams University.

In the beginning, art-related courses were limited to art appreciation. In the following decade, the institution began to offer courses in education, art practice and art history. Eventually, each of these courses paved the way for the creation of a sector in which the students could specialize.

1955

Fernande Saint-Martin and Guido Molinari open Galerie l'Actuelle in Montreal. Showing exclusively abstract art during its two years of activity.

Group show of the first Plasticiens group (Belzile, Jauran, Jérôme, Toupin) at Café l'échouerie.

1957

The federal government sets up the Canada Council for the Arts.

1958

Construction and inauguration of a permanent Canadian pavilion on the Venice Biennale's Arsenal site. (Canada has been represented at the Venice Biennale since 1952, but it is only in 1958, on the occasion of the twenty-ninth biennale, that it began occupying a pavilion of its own.) "Evoking a nautilus seashell, the glass and wood pavilion was designed by the Milanese architect agency BBPR and built under the auspices of the National Gallery of Canada, with support from the Canadian government."

1959

Art abstrait, a group show of the second Plasticiens group (Molinari, Tousignant, Goguen, Juneau) at École des beaux-arts de Montréal.

Sir George Williams College, still under Y.M.C.A. trusteeship (until 1967), changes its name and officially becomes Sir George Williams University.

1960

Paul-Émile Borduas dies.

The education orientation at George Williams College is gradually modified in the 1960s. As of 1961, survey courses are replaced with department courses, thus allowing students to choose a specialization among the faculties created in 1963.

The project to set up a fine arts department at Sir George Williams University "benefited from the exceptional conjuncture of the social climate, the educational needs and the synergy of people with different talents, but with shared goals. The 1960s was a period in which traditional values, both in the field of art and Quebecois society as a whole, were changing and being questioned. In Quebec, the reform was applied to the entire education system and universities underwent rapid growth. There is a general tendency to democratize education so as to better serve society on the whole. Universities are asked to broaden their fields of specialization, to include non-traditional sectors and to serve a broader segment of the population. Education in the arts is at a crossroads. The arts milieu is beginning to view the artist not only as a technician who is trained in a studio arts technique, but as an intellectual whose ideas and values can

contribute to the culture at large. In North America, while the expansion of universities are financed by governments, arts training moves away from private art schools and is integrated into universities. In Quebec and Canada, young people who want to pursue a professional career in art recognize the importance of a university degree.”

1961

Creation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs by the Quebec government. (There is a lack of financial resources in the beginning of the 1960s, but the provincial government nevertheless sets up a creation support program, promoting the Musée du Québec in Quebec City to the rank of “art museum” and founds the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.)

1962

Establishment of the fine arts department inside the faculty of arts at Sir George Williams University. Alfred Pinsky, a Montreal painter, professor and art critic is the department’s first dean.

Development of an artwork acquisition program by Samuel H. Schecter, a Montreal businessman, with Douglass Burns Clarke, vice-rector and music professor at Sir George Williams University. Schecter and Clarke draw up the guidelines and procedures to oversee the project, deciding that the collection focus on Canadian works (painting, sculpture and other types of art objects), figurative or abstract and of high quality. Based on soliciting cash donations, deposited into an account named “Special Art Collection Account” the project serves to buy works selected by Schecter and Clarke. Also involved in the project is Alfred Pinsky, then Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, though it is difficult to ascertain the nature of his input to date.

Together the visionaries had four aims in mind: contribute to the creation of a public image, enhance the prestige of the university, decorate the walls of the establishment and provide a direct experience of the works to the university community, particularly fine arts students.

The acquired works were systematically exhibited in the halls, common areas and classrooms for the benefit of the university community.

1963

At the time of the project’s announcement to the university community via a press release, on January 15, 1963, the collection already comprised six works created by Edmund Alleyn (*Warrior No. 1*), Sindon Gérard Gecin (*Madonne aux poissons*), Patrick Landsley (*Tree in full*

Bloom), Stanley Lewis (*Standing Woman*), Goodridge Roberts (*Georgian Bay*) and an unknown Inuit artist (*Seal Hunter*).

The six inaugural works acquired by the university, constituting the core of the collection, are exhibited in the Faculty of Arts Council room.

A group of painters gathered around Otto Bengle (Galerie Soixante) approach the Ministère des Affaires culturelles and each proposing to donate one of their works to build up the first collection of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Art critics and directors of cultural institutions who had contributed to spreading modernist ideas supported the group.

Stan Horner an artist and art educator arrives at Sir George Williams University and participates in the development of the Fine Arts department with Douglass Burns Clarke, Leah Sherman and Alfred Pinsky.

1964

Production and distribution of the first illustrated catalogue¹ of the collection (Douglass Burns Clarke [1976] *Decades of decisions: Sir George Williams University, 1952-53 to 1972-73*, 233 pages).

George-Émile Lapalme (Minister of Cultural Affaires) sets up the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

Edwy Cooke, art gallery director and art historian, arrives at Sir George Williams University and participates in the development of the Fine Arts department with Douglass Burns Clarke, Leah Sherman, Alfred Pinsky, and Stan Horner.

1965

Samuel H. Schechter develops a collection for Loyola College following the same guidelines and procedures.

Artists' whose practices are geared towards the production of cutting edge non-figurative works gather to set up the Association des artistes non-figuratifs (AANF) – First president: Fernand Leduc / cofounder: Rodolphe De Repentigny.

¹ As mentioned in "Douglass Burns Clarke (1976), *Decades of Decisions: Sir George Williams University, 1952-53 to 1972-73*, 233 pages."

1966

Now comprising 174 works the university collection demands greater attention, leading to the opening of a gallery.

The Sir George Williams Art Galleries, located in a relatively open space in the Hall Building's mezzanine, are officially inaugurated. The use of the plural in the institution's name echoes its layout, which consists of rooms I and II, an open exhibition space facing the curator's office, another room and two exhibition showcases. This new dissemination institution is directed by Edwy F. Cooke, Director of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the time, who is joined by Christopher Gabriel-Lacki in the position of curator.

The first formal exhibition of the Sir George Williams Galleries is presented in the new spaces. The collecting project grows in importance and attracts more collaborators, whether as patrons or otherwise. The circle of people who contribute to its development grows increasingly wider. For example, over the fall, university graduates organize a ten-day artwork auction for the benefit of the university's permanent collection

1967

Concordia University becomes independent and is no longer under the trusteeship of the Y.M.C.A.

1969

One of the galleries' rooms is named the *The Weissman Gallery* in recognition of a donation by Percy E. Weissman during the fall season.

“Set up in reaction to the student unease at École des beaux-arts de Montréal and as a means to evaluate art education in Quebec, the Rioux Commission presents the results of its studies. This detailed report places the arts among the top priorities of a society facing post-industrial changes and approves Sir George Williams University's model of integrating the arts in the university.”

1972

The Council of Universities of the Quebec Department of Education approves the fine arts as a core development focus for Sir George Williams University.

Heritage Canada creates the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) and gives it the mandate of promoting and advancing the practice, science and technology of conservation.

1973

After eight years of service, Edwy Cooke ends his mandate as director. He is replaced by Donald Andrus, the director of the Faculty of Arts at the time.

1974

Merger of Sir George Williams University and Loyola College under the name “Concordia University.”

1979

The collections of the Sir George Williams University Art Galleries and Loyola College are combined into a single collection after the creation of Concordia University.

1980

Donald Andrus ends his mandate as director after seven years of service and is replaced by Christopher Gabriel-Lacki.

The administrative structure of the Sir George Williams Art Galleries is modified. The position of registrar is gradually abandoned in favour of a full-time curatorial assistant position. This new position allows the galleries to offer Concordia University graduate students a two-year internship with the goal of providing practical experience of all the aspects involved in running an art gallery.

1981

Christopher Gabriel-Lacki ends his mandate as director after two years of service, he is replaced by Sandra Paikowsky, the director of the Faculty of Arts at the time.

1982

The university modifies the administrative structure of the gallery. On the recommendation of Edwy Cooke, it gives the full responsibility of the gallery to the curator in office, who nevertheless remains under the supervision of the dean of the Faculty of Arts. Heritage Canada grants an "A" status to the gallery, permitting requests that the works in its collection be certified as "cultural goods" by the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board (CCPERB).

The gallery celebrates the twentieth anniversary of its collection by organizing an exhibition that aims to present what the in-service staff considered to be the best works of the collection.

1983

Concordia University announces the official change of its name from Sir George Williams Galleries to Concordia Art Gallery. However, the stationery bearing the old name remained in use over the following months and even years, extending the circulation of the old name.

The collection now contains close to 1 500 works.

1990

Leonard and Bina Ellen, as well as a group of donors, offer an important financial donation to the gallery to assist with the reinstallation of the gallery in the recently built McConnell pavilion and the creation of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Endowment Fund for the collection of artworks.

1992

The gallery is moved to a ground floor space in the J. W. McConnell Building and its collection is stored in a museum reserve custom fitted to meet the needs of the institution. This reserve was equipped with museum quality art racks and various furnishing units to securely store the works. At the same time, the Concordia Art Gallery was renamed "Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery" in honour of the two major donors behind the substantial donation the gallery received in 1990.

After twelve years Sandra Paikowsky ends her mandate as director and is replaced by Karen Antaki who is hired as interim curator.

1995

Karen Antaki is officially hired as the director-curator of the gallery. She is the first person to occupy the position of dean of the Faculty of Arts. The gallery can thus further open itself up to the Montreal arts milieu and hire professional and qualified employees. This marks a dissociation between the gallery and the faculty.

2001

Karen Antaki ends her mandate after nine years of service and is replaced by Lynn Beavis who is hired as interim curator.

2003

The university implements a competitive selection process to choose the next gallery director. Michèle Thériault obtains the position and replaces Lynn Beavis.

Upon taking up her position, the new director remodels the gallery's orientation on the basis of modifications underway in similar Canadian institutions. Her mandate is focused on a critical exploration of contemporary art and curatorial practices and an opening up to international practices and contexts. Furthermore, she imposes a moratorium on acquisitions in order to rethink the gallery's collection practices and orientations.

During this moratorium, Michèle Thériault invited exhibition curators to organize projects that highlight the gallery's collection through critical and original curatorial approaches. The suspension of acquisitions greatly favoured the dissemination of works in the collection and by the same token contributed to a revitalization and inscription of the collection in the gallery's editorial and programming standpoint.

2004

A donation from the Max Stern Estate makes it possible to set up an endowment foundation and to create the position of Max Stern curator for the benefit of the collection. Nathalie Garneau is hired to fill this position.

2005

The creation of the Max Stern curator position and the continuation of the moratorium on work acquisitions (2003-2011) made it possible to dedicate more time to the dissemination of the collection and to approach it in an increasingly critical manner. The exhibition program *Collection* emerged in this context to more deeply explore the various aspects of the collection. It began with the presentation of Collection 1. *Yves Gaucher – Les Danses Carrées*, an exhibition curated by the Max Stern Curator, Nathalie Garneau.

2006

The gallery greatly improved the environmental conditions of its reserve by undertaking repairs. The ventilation duct, the cracks and holes in the outer walls, floor and ceiling were all sealed. Moreover, all the surfaces were sealed with a vapour barrier paint and the doors fitted with neoprene sills and retractable edge joints. The project was carried out thanks to a subsidy by Heritage Canada through the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund.

It also added museum quality storage unit, such as supplementary storage racks and shelves, and enclosed furniture with drawers and shelves to hold small objects.

The gallery presents Collection 2, *Sur le vif: Tom Gibson and Sam Tata* an exhibition curated by the Max Stern Curator, Nathalie Garneau.

2007

The gallery begins an important digitization of its collection that unfolds over three consecutive years. It draws up priority lists before determining the order in which it will photograph the works in its collection in view of disseminating them on the Artefacts Canada database (Canadian Heritage Information Network), after having obtained the requisite authorizations.

2008

Nathalie Garneau leaves the position of Max Stern curator after four years of service and is replaced by Mélanie Rainville.

Andrew Hunter is invited to use the works of the collection to organize a project, taking advantage of the situation to create an autobiographical narrative as part of the exhibition *This is Montréal!* He chooses works that echo souvenirs from a childhood trip to Montreal. The

collection functioned as a historical marker that refers as much to the curator, author and artist's life as it does to the history of art in Quebec.

2009

The sprinkler heads in the vault are all replaced.

The lighting system in the reserve and the gallery is changed to meet museum standards with the objective to obtain a higher quality lighting and improve the conservation conditions of the works. The lighting, now brighter than before, no longer modifies the colour of the works during their observation in the vault. The new UV-block fluorescent tubes prevent light radiation that can damage the works. These new 5000K and IRC 92 Philips "Natural Sunshine" brand fluorescent tubes are equipped with 98% clear UV-block "TubeGuards."

The guest curators Rebecca Duclos and David K. Ross carry out the project *As Much As Possible Given the Time and Space Allotted*, at the gallery. This project explores various questions related to the subjectivity and methodology of exhibition curators, revealing the backstage operations of exhibitions while presenting works from the collection that have rarely been shown over the years.

2010

The gallery presents the exhibition *Collecting: The Inflections of a Practice*, curated by the Max Stern Curator, Mélanie Rainville, and revealing considerable information about the gallery's collecting history and practices. The project provides an opportunity to reflect on changes in an institution's acquisition, conservation and dissemination practices of an institution by way of the content of its collection.

After eight years of moratorium on collection activities, the gallery restarts its acquisition program in 2011 by releasing its thoroughly rethought and rewritten Acquisition Policy. This moratorium led to a deep reflection about the nature and pertinence of an artwork collecting project in a university context, and to the execution of major projects such as the repair of the vaults, the updating of its work inventory, a digitization and search for right-holders project, as well as important curatorial projects that approached the collection from a critical vantage point.

The gallery sets up an acquisition committee. It invites two external experts and an internal expert to join Director, Michèle Thériault, and Max Stern Curator, Mélanie Rainville, in the selection process of works as part of its work acquisition program.

2011

The gallery acquires five works created by the artists Sophie Bélair Clément, Olivia Boudreau, Nelson Henricks, Leisure Projects and Thérèse Mastroiacovo with the approval of its acquisition committee.

The gallery disseminates its first online project. Midway between a virtual exhibition and an exhibition archive, the project is titled *Collecting: The Inflections of a Practice*, referring to the reworking of the content of the eponymous exhibition (2010). Carried out by the Max Stern Curator, Mélanie Rainville, in collaboration with Uniform (1F), this project was the occasion to reflect on the nature, function and structure of an online exhibition.

2012

The gallery celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its collection and the twentieth anniversary of its name and current location. A reception is organized to thank the gallery's loyal collaborators.

A satellite exhibition program called SIGHTINGS is created to disseminate the collection and build bonds between the gallery and the university's Faculty of Fine Arts.

2013

Death of Mr. Leonard Ellen at the age of 87.

The gallery acquires twenty-two works created by the artists Raymonde April, Caroline Boileau, Olivia Boudreau, Brendan Fernandes, Tim Clark, Kent Monkman, Adrian Norvid and Rober Racine, with the approval of its acquisition committee.

2014

The Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) accepts a request regarding the restoration of 98 pre-Columbian objects in the gallery's collection. The work that the CCA graciously carried contributes to a better dissemination of the objects.

The gallery launches the Leonard & Bina Ellen Program in Support of Artistic Production. Over two years, it invites an artist or an artist group to propose a work project taking the future programming of the Gallery into account. This Program is open to all mediums and practices, including ephemeral, immaterial and site-specific works. The recipient receives up to \$ 22,000 for his or her new production. The gallery staff is grateful to the Ellen family and other

benefactors who enthusiastically supported the periodic redistribution of its Art Work Acquisition Fund. This strategy reflects a contemporary approach to supporting current practices, not only because it emphasizes the acquisition of a completed art work, but also the artistic creation process itself.

The exhibition *Speculations. Risquer l'interprétation*, curated by the Max Stern curator, Mélanie Rainville is presented at the gallery from November 18, 2014 to January 31, 2015. Presenting over thirty contemporary works from the collection, including several recent acquisitions, the exhibition raises questions about the interpretation of works and the role of the exhibition curator, memory and cultural overload, the exhibition of works from the permanent collection and promotional approaches, historical over-consciousness and the ubiquity of texts surrounding contemporary works.

Mélanie Rainville leaves the position of Max Stern Curator after seven years of service.

2015

The Max Stern Curator position is revised in order to adequately respond to the changing realities in the contemporary art milieu. It consequently becomes the "Max Stern Curator of Research." Katrie Chagnon is the first person to hold this position.

2017

The gallery acquires ten works created by the artists Jo-Anne Balcaen, Raymond Boisjoly, Moyra Davey, Suzy Lake, Isabelle Pauwels, Krista Belle Stewart et Ian Wallace, with the approval of its acquisition committee.