

TRANSCENDENCE (1967), Walter Führrer

This is the fourth Stop on the Public Art, Public Memory tour of Loyola Campus.

In the centre of the quad between the Hingston Hall residence buildings and the Psychology Building stands *Transcendence* — a 7.3-metre-tall black sculpture by Walter Führrer. Made primarily of stainless steel, its geometric, kinetic style is evocative of work by American sculptor Alexander Calder. The imposing sculpture features interconnected arches, curved pillars, spheres, and a mechanical brass orb that moves in the summer months. Does it resemble a human-like figure going for a stretch? A rocket ready to take flight? A communications tower? Or perhaps a little of each?

Transcendence was originally commissioned by the Bronfman family's House of Seagram as a public artwork for the 1967 International and Universal Exposition in Montreal — better known as Expo 67. Given its towering presence, *Transcendence* is visible in postcards featuring the German pavilion, serving as a visual marker of its iconic location on Notre-Dame Island.

The theme of Expo 67 was "Man and his World" — a phrase that captured the mid-century's optimism. While it can be read as a celebration of the Space Age and its scientific advances, the theme was intended more simply: to explore global achievements and cultural exchange.

Still, language changes over time. Though the slogan was likely uncontroversial in its day, viewed through a contemporary lens, its gendered phrasing stands out. Today, we recognize the need for more inclusive expressions to describe all of humanity.

Much of Expo 67's physical footprint is now gone. After the fair, the City of Montreal acquired the grounds and pavilions. Several decades later, the site was repurposed as Parc Jean-Drapeau — now one of Montreal's largest urban parks. Yet the event left a lasting mark on the city's identity and infrastructure.

Following the close of Expo 67, Führrer's work was donated to what was then Loyola College by the Bronfman family — a fitting continuation of the work's legacy as a symbol of progress, exploration, and imagination.

Throughout his career, Führer was known for producing large-scale works in metal, bronze, and other recycled materials. *Transcendence* was constructed from steel at the Montréal Welding Shop. Other notable works by Führer have been shown locally in museums such as the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, and in group exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada. He has also exhibited at the Musée Rodin in Paris, and his pieces are held in many permanent collections.

Führer's practice was inspired by questions of the universe, space, natural order and collective unity — so much so that friends and family nicknamed him "Cosmos". The term — derived from the Greek *kosmos*, meaning a well-ordered universe — dates back to the sixth century BCE. Perhaps Walter Führer was on a quest to create art that not only drew inspiration from the solar system but also expressed a deeper desire for universal harmony.

These themes resonated widely during the Space Age, when fascination with the cosmos gripped both the public imagination and geopolitical powers like the United States and the Soviet Union. With Führer's preoccupation, the cultural moment, and the rocket-like shape of *Transcendence*, the sculpture was a natural fit for Expo 67.

Its presence on a university campus dedicated to scientific exploration feels equally appropriate. Though we are well beyond the golden age of space exploration and post-war optimism, *Transcendence* continues to offer a window into that era — a time when Montreal opened its doors to the world and invited millions to imagine what might come next.

To continue this tour, click on *Four Horsemen* by François Houde.