

# *FOUR HORSEMEN* (1989), François Houdé

This is the last stop on the Public Art, Public Memory tour of Loyola Campus.

In the stairwell between the second and third storeys of the Georges P. Vanier Library, you will find 300 translucent decorative glass bricks embedded in the wall. Known as Falconnier bricks, they are evocative of popular post-modern architectural styles which often blended ornamental elements — like glass and metal archways — into structural design. But this wall is more than just an architectural feature; it forms part of a larger glass and metal sculpture titled *Four Horsemen*, created by François Houdé.

The Vanier Library first opened in October 1964 and was inaugurated by Georges Philias Vanier — then Governor-General of Canada and Loyola College alumnus. Named in his honour, the library recognizes Vanier's role as the first Governor-General to come from Quebec. Installed twenty-five years later, *Four Horsemen* was added during the library's 1989 expansion and developed through Quebec's One Per Cent for Public Art program.

Standing 2.75 metres high and 6.5 metres wide, the translucent bas-relief is rich in detail. In the upper left corner, sandblasted into the bricks, is an etching of cavalry galloping into battle. The imagery evokes *The Four Horsemen* from Albrecht Dürer's Apocalypse woodcut series which depicts religious scenes from the Book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament.

You may also notice four pointed metal arches fastened to the sculpture's centre, suggesting a church portal. In the top left corner, frosted glass impressions of cavalry emerge; in the middle right, a sequence of horse-drawn carriages. These forms allude to friezes from the Parthenon and movement studies by Eadweard Muybridge — a reference echoed in Adad Hannah's *Leap*, a work featured in the *Public Art, Science and Technology* tour.

If you are able, we invite you to pause this tour and examine the details from different vantage points on the stairs. Look from the landing, the top of the stairs, then the balcony. What do you notice?

This work is part of Houdé's *Ming Series*, which uses rich visual language to make links with historical and cultural histories. Appearing as a dramatic and dynamic tableau, *Four Horsemen* reflects what Houdé considered to be key moments in literature, history, science, and visual art. This focus was shaped in part by his creative process, during which he researched thinkers, artists, writers and scientists he saw as essential to the foundations of Western history. As he described it, the work "serves as a visual metaphor of building civilizations."

In addition to the deliberate visual references scattered throughout the work, Houdé incorporated literary ones — most notably, an excerpt from a poem by Gwendolyn MacEwen, visible in the top right corner of the sculpture. At the artist's request, the same lines are included on an adjacent wall panel.

If you are able to, we invite you to find the text which is located on a wall plaque. Follow along as we read it on this tour:

*Go and tell: It is morning,  
And this horse with a mane the colour of sea foam  
Is the first horse that the world has ever seen.  
The white horse which stands now watching you  
Across this field of endless sunlight*

MacEwen's text beams with excitement and curiosity. In what ways does the artwork mirror her tone?

Though Houdé's work was grounded in conceptual practice, he was best known internationally as a glass artist. In 1988, he became the first Canadian to be invited to the international Glass Symposium in the former Czechoslovakia. His work was widely exhibited across North America, including at Concordia's Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery, and posthumously during a retrospective at the Centre Materia in Quebec City in 1993. He also played a pivotal role in the development of glass art in Quebec, co-founding the Centre des métiers du verre du Québec (now Espace VERRE).

Houdé was an artist driven by knowledge, exploration and curiosity — qualities reflected in both his career and his work. *Four Horsemen* is a fitting presence in the Vanier Library, where it continues to inspire those very same values in those who encounter it.

This concludes the *Public Art, Public Memory* tour of Loyola Campus. Continue the audio-guided tours with the *Public Art, Science and Technology* tour of Loyola Campus.