

Creating Context in the Quebec and Canadian Painting Collection at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

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Most art museums today favour period framing. As explained by D. Gene Karraker, “A period frame relates to the historical details or fashion of the time of the artwork the frame supports.”¹ Specialists in the field are now focusing on historical and geographical framing considerations to contextualize the origin of a painting. Provenance, historical and geographical aesthetic trends, as well as the artist’s own choice of a frame, have all become influential factors.

Before the adoption of this trend, framing practices were influenced by several factors, including economic conditions, society, religious context, and changing styles, weakening the connection between the frame and the painting. Framing practices at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) were also influenced by these various factors. As research on the history of frames becomes more available, we are able to better appreciate the importance of frames and see the past in a new light.

In 2011, the opening of the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion of Quebec and Canadian Art provided the MMFA with the rare opportunity to reconsider the frames on some major paintings, both new acquisitions and works that had been in the collection for years.

This paper provides a description of the process and tools we used to achieve what we judged to be the best possible frame-to-painting combinations. In preparing the frames for the new pavilion, the goal was clear: to consistently respect, and when necessary, attempt to create a historically and geographically coherent context for the paintings, according to the financial, technical, and human resources available at the time. Most of the decisions were a collaborative effort made by our team of curators, Jacques Des Rochers (Quebec and Canadian art) and Anne Grace (modern art), in conjunction to consultations with conservators Richard Gagnier, Catherine O’Meara, and myself, as the basis for transformations in the collection.

The Bourgie Pavilion consists of six floors of exhibition space, each one with a specific historical theme. Works on four floors required important frame revisions. Each of these four galleries encompasses a specific historical theme, and with it, challenges.

The Founding Identities (1700–1870) and *The Era of Annual Exhibitions* (1880s–1920s) galleries required the most planning because of the potential complexity of the framing projects. The often ornate and gilded frames dating between 1700 and 1900 require a great deal of time to restore and even more so to reproduce.² More than two-thirds of the time devoted to frame preparation (or 2,200 work hours) was spent on frames for these periods. At least two-thirds of these works were historically and aesthetically matched with their frames, fifteen of which needed restoration, while the remaining eight frames were either replaced with a copy of a period frame or a modification of an existing frame.

Towards Modernism (1920s–1930s) and *The Age of the Manifesto* (1940s–1960s) were eras when frames had a more streamlined aesthetic, so restoring, replacing, or reproducing historic frames was easier to accomplish. However, we had to be aware of how our aesthetic subjectivity can cloud our judgement when the past is not so distant: frames from the 1940s to the 1970s deemed as unappealing just a few decades ago were now being re-evaluated for their historical value.

Defining Our Priorities

The historical connection between a painting and its frame was the most important factor in deciding whether to restore or replace a frame. Usually, the most unflattering combinations stemmed from great discrepancies between the age of a painting and that of its frame. As well, the more obviously unsuitable frames were often industrially made. Modern paintings are a good example of this phenomenon, as they were often reframed by their owners in contemporary industrial frames, with disregard for historical accuracy.

Our second guideline was a basic practical consideration: did we have the financial resources to purchase a reproduction or the time to restore a frame? As a general rule, the older the artwork, the greater the investment in time and/or money required, since older frames are usually ornate and gilded. If our budget did not allow for either the purchase of a historical frame or the production of a copy, or if deadlines were too tight for a proper conservation treatment, historical framing was sometimes put off until such time as resources allowed for it.

The conservation of historically appropriate frames, when feasible, resulted in pertinent and more satisfying results than producing a copy, purchasing a period frame, or compromising on historical authenticity. We also used less financially demanding compromises, such as recycling abandoned frames that were in storage or making simplified interpretations of period frames.

Tools and Resources

During our decision-making process, we relied on a variety of resources: the Museum's curatorial and conservation files, publications on framing, and archival photographs, as well as consultations with professionals like art historians, framers, and art dealers.

The MMFA's curatorial and conservation files were used to establish a painting's history and find documentation about past framing transformations. Conservation files had notes about labels and markings at the back of frames, frame condition and sometimes their replacement, whereas curatorial files contained information pertaining to provenance and photographs of past exhibitions. Unfortunately, these files were not always a consistent source of information: little attention had been given to frames, as they were not always considered integral to the works of art. Consequently, they are less documented and not included in the Museum database. Frames have been known to simply "disappear" from the collection, especially when technical resources were lacking to restore them or if they were considered unsightly by current trends.

Publications on period framing were invaluable in providing a historical basis for our choices. The MMFA's library has a significant collection of reference books on frames, including exhibition catalogues and books on the history of frames.³ Auction catalogues and magazines devoted to framing were also consulted. Art history books and journals rarely refer to frames, but when they do, they are a precious resource.

In 1995, some 250 abandoned frames collecting dust under a stairwell were inventoried and photographed.⁴ With the information gathered during the process, we assigned new uses for these frames, and in some cases reunited frames that had been separated from their original paintings. In 2009, in preparation for the opening of the Bourgie Pavilion, all of the Quebec and Canadian paintings in the collection were photographed in their frames, right or wrong, in good or bad condition.⁵ This newly structured information enabled us to assess the requirements for framing transformations and make some, perhaps, creative matches between frames and paintings.

For example, the original frame for *The Fortune Teller* (1939) by Henry Rowland Eveleigh (1909–1999) was found in storage thanks to a label linking the frame to its painting. With two broken corners and a grimy finish that was almost completely wiped off, it was in dire shape: "Encadrement d'origine (!) mais dans un état lamentable" [original frame (!) in a deplorable state] (conservation report, Rodrigue Bédard, 1980). The frame seemed to have been constructed from scratch, possibly by the artist himself, with quarter-rounds and plain wood planks. Its intriguingly simple handmade quality was reason enough to consider bringing it back to its original state. The corners



1 | Henry Rowland Eveleigh, *The Fortune Teller*, 1939, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 50.8 cm (98 × 72.5 cm framed), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1942.770. Original artist's frame; wax and coloured gesso on wood. (Photo: Christine Guest, MMFA)

were reconstructed, the structure solidified, and the original finish was re-created. The result was an unforeseen enhancement to the painting, which seemed to occupy a larger space, with parts of the composition coming alive again (Fig. 1).

Visits to Canadian institutions with collections similar to ours – such as the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Musée National des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) – have all proven very beneficial, as they have had to deal with issues similar to ours at one time or another. We were authorized to visit galleries and storage facilities and take photographs, and were granted access to privileged technical information, such as detailed plans of historical mouldings. As written or photographic documentation on frames is close to non-existent in Canada, the opportunity to document artists' frame preferences supplied us with valuable guidelines.

The professionals we consulted were also vitally important to our decision-making process. A growing awareness and sharing of expertise among museum professionals, gallery owners, art collectors, and commercial framers ensures the hope that the preservation of historical evidence continues to thrive. Curators, historians, and framing professionals generously shared their time and experience and were valuable sources of information. The following curators were exceptionally generous with their time and expertise and were truly inspirational: Charles C. Hill, formerly at the National Gallery of Canada; Greg Humeniuk and Dennis Reid, formerly at the Art Gallery of Ontario; Yves Lacasse and Jean-Pierre Labiau, both formerly at the MNBAQ. In addition, independent framers collaborated with us, providing crucial input pertaining to the construction, design and technical information that facilitated the creation of convincing copies made in-house.

Types of intervention

Conservation Treatments

A frame deemed appropriate for a specific painting, but in need of restoration, was declared a treasure to be preserved. The amount of time needed to carry out a treatment rarely lessened our determination to honour the quality of these matches. To give new life to tired and battered frames, the usual course of action was to: strengthen the structure of the frame; consolidate unstable areas; clean the surface; reconstruct missing ornaments; fill in areas of loss; gild; and adjust the tone or completely refinish the surface.

This process was chosen for *Mrs. Colin Robertson, née Theresa Chalifoux* (1833) by James Bowman (1793–1842). Although the frame was of a slightly later date than the painting, it was decided that it would be visually satisfying



2 | James Bowman, *Mrs. Colin Robertson, née Theresa Chalifoux*. 1833, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm (96 × 83 cm framed), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1944.1255. Frame of a later date than that of the painting, possibly the end of the nineteenth century. Coloured shellac on silver leaf on wood, with gold leaf on compo ornaments. (Photo: Christine Guest, MMFA)

if restored. The tarnished silver leaf surface and oxidation on the bronzine-covered ornaments were visually distracting and ill-suited to the painting. A complete restoration of the silver leaf gilding was undertaken: the coloured shellac coating was removed, and the silver was gently polished to recover its light tone. Blonde shellac glazes were applied to recreate its light gold tone, and mordant gilding with gold skewings covered the dark bronzine on the



2a | Detail of Fig. 2. Bottom left corner of frame, before restoration. Oxidized silver leaf is covered with shellac. Bronzine on outer areas is oxidized and discoloured. Shellac on bottom member of liner has been removed and the silver is clean. (Photo: author)

floral compo ornaments.⁶ The transformed frame now subtly enhances the painting it accompanies (Figs. 2, 2a, 2b, 2c).

In the case of the original frame found on our recently acquired *Montreal Cabbies, a Rush for a Fare* (1883) by Alfred Boisseau (1823–1901), a complete restoration was well worth the effort and time. Its intense ornament arrangement and bronzine-covered surface are typical of the late nineteenth century. This frame is a clear example of how creatively and extensively compo applications can be used. The very ornate nature, yet modest surface finish, supports the anecdotal qualities of the painting. Other than its stylistic attributes, it is quite clearly original to the painting, as it had never been unframed, as well as being perfectly matched in size, and it seems to have aged in sync with the painting. The evenly tarnished bronzine finish and the disjointed, broken corners were conditions that attested to years of neglect and hinted at the frame's long-standing relationship with the now-yellowed painting. Our team's decision to restore⁷ the frame and the painting was unequivocal. As with the painting – whose darkened varnish, once removed,



2b | Detail of Fig. 2. Bottom left corner of frame, during restoration. Tarnish on silver leaf has been removed. (Photo: author)



2c | Detail of Fig. 2. Bottom left corner of frame, during restoration. Gold (skewings) applied to compo ornaments. (Photo: author)

revealed the true atmosphere of the composition – the restored frame had found its elegance and historical value.

New Frames Based on Historical Research

Most reference books relating to older frames are European, but we were able to use these as a guide, as our collection of colonial paintings reflect the European influence. For the framing of more recent works – especially Modern art – we were able to use research carried out by American art historians and information shared at framing conferences.⁸

The frame for Wyatt Eaton's (1849–1896) *Noon-day Rest* (1884) is a good example of a copy we created based on research. The painting was acquired by the MMFA in 1889, only five years after the work of art was executed, most likely in a beautiful nineteenth-century frame of the Barbizon or Salon styles. It probably hung in the galleries in its historical frame until it was reframed with a modern travelling frame for an exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1967. Unfortunately, it was never reunited with its original frame.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, ornate gilded frames were systematically removed from paintings promised for loans and replaced with new travelling frames built from a generic industrial moulding. All of these frames were made from this same moulding. They were cut down to size and adapted to suit each painting by using a wide array of coloured paint finishes. Their moderate visual success and low production costs made them commonly accepted as museum travelling frames in the 1970s. The tragedy is that many paintings, upon their return from loans, never found their way back into their original frames (Fig. 3).⁹

Although a Barbizon or Salon-style frame would have suited *Noon-day Rest* marvellously, it would have been very costly and time consuming to produce. Instead, we opted for the more economical solution of creating a relatively simple neoclassical profile: the date was appropriate, and the proportions were in harmony with the painting. We chose to make a frame inspired by the work of Isaac Whitehead, a nineteenth-century framer in Australia.¹⁰ The personality of this new frame resides in its corner ornaments. We highlighted the Canadian spirit of the painting by decorating the corners with oak leaves and acorns instead of the more traditional European acanthus leaves. Compo ornaments purchased from a specialized ornament maker in Chicago¹¹ and a traditionally gilded finish helped give the frame a historical feel.

Illustrating our concern to respect religious and societal backgrounds is *The Virgin Embracing Christ and the Reed* (before 1670) by Claude François, called Frère Luc (1614–1685). Acquired without a frame, this small circular painting on copper is typical of the easily transportable, privately owned



3 | Wyatt Eaton, *Noon-day Rest*, oil on canvas, 1884, 90.3 × 117.2 cm (118 × 144.5 cm framed), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1889.46. Reproduction frame, gold leaf on composition ornaments and wood. (Photo: Christine Guest, MMFA)

objects of devotion made in late seventeenth-century France. Because of its modest dimensions, its beauty could easily be overlooked in a museum setting. We felt that a more voluminous frame would heighten the painting's presence. The artist's European and religious affiliations were also considered. Although Frère Luc had ties to Quebec, he had worked primarily in France. The painting had been acquired through the European market, thus confirming that a European contextualisation was more appropriate. As devotion, poverty, and simplicity were values highly promoted by the Franciscan Recollects, we wanted to avoid overt ostentatiousness.

We chose to copy the frame of *The Nativity* (about 1655) by Charles Poerson (1609–1667), a French artist of the period. Its modest ornamentation and the purity of the profile consolidated our decision.¹² We chose very simple corner insets to keep decoration to a minimum (Fig. 4).



4 | Claude François, called Frère Luc, *The Virgin Embracing Christ and the Reed*, before 1670, oil on copper, 19.6 cm (approximate diameter) (41 × 41 cm framed), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2007.360. Reproduction frame: gold leaf on sand and composition ornaments on wood. (Photo: Christine Guest, MMFA)

Creations Born from Collaborations

Our visits to other institutions – and exchanges we had with their staff – led to inspired, fact-based creativity. For *At the Theatre* (1928) by Prudence Heward (1896–1947), we created a frame inspired by the original surround on another Heward painting in the NGC collection: *Girl on a Hill* (1928, inv. 3678). Its frame was relevant because of its authenticity and date, as well as its design. We chose to make a copy without corner ornaments because *At the Theatre*'s composition was very busy. We opted for the cold hue of the

graphite finish typically found on Lawren Harris frames of the same period rather than the warmth of the copper leaf on the NGC frame because it harmonized more effectively with the colours in our painting.

The frame on *Lunar Eclipse* (1909) by Horatio Walker (1858–1938) was inspired by the one housing his *Noce canadienne* (1930, inv. 1934.531), at the MNBAQ. After examining the detailed drawing of the profile sent to us by their technician, we made some modifications. We adapted the width of the profile to better suit our painting, and opted for a dark brown reeding, with a narrower gilded liner to match the dark tones of *Lunar Eclipse*. These changes comfortably lead the eye into the composition, without overpowering the painting, all the while respecting a style proper to the early twentieth century.

The MMFA purchased a number of historical frames dating back to the 1940s and 1950s from a framer who was going out of business. These frames are often overlooked treasures, as they are from a period too recent to be considered objectively. For example, frames made between the 1930s and 1960s tended to be discarded in the 1980s because they were considered homely and unflattering. Yet some of these more recent frames are just as invested with historical pertinence as centuries-old ones. Our changing taste and lack of hindsight tend to blind our judgement.

These newly acquired frames were well suited to some of our paintings from the 1940s and 1950s. We kept a selection of these frames on hand in the conservation laboratory. They were used as inspiration to make copies from, or simply cut down to fit, the paintings they suited. There are at least four paintings that benefitted from this process.¹³ Whenever the right frame was found, the painting returned to its historical context.

Antique dealers also had a role to play, not only because they sometimes had appropriate frames for sale, but because of their ability to date a frame, often in reference to a painting's provenance. The frame for *Self-Portrait* (1842) by Alfred Boisseau was much too recent and unflattering. With some work, the crude compo ornaments, copper-coloured bronzine finish, and commercial silver liner could have been improved upon, yet without convincing results. A historical frame in an antique shop inspired us. Although we could not afford to purchase it, we made a copy and reproduced the finish. The sitter's intense gaze is now emphasized by a structure highlighting the warm tones of the composition, and the resulting effect makes the painting stand out.

Reduce, Re-use, Recycle

To respect budget and time constraints, we practised the 3 Rs: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. We had been collecting discarded period frames and had on hand a stock of custom-made moulding left over from past projects. Creative solutions to some problematic reframing issues were facilitated.



5 | Adrien Hébert, *Corner Peel and Sainte-Catherine*, 1948, oil on canvas, 76.5 × 101.5 cm (95.5 × 121 cm framed), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2010.645. Reassigned frame; formerly on *Lunar Eclipse* by Horatio Walker. Spattered paint and bronzine on flat grey paint on wood. (Photo: Christine Guest, MMFA)

In reducing, we adapted frames to the required size and refinished them appropriately. Wrongly matched frames were reused and assigned to paintings more in keeping with their aesthetics. When recycling, we transformed size, finish, and/or style, creating an array of new possibilities.

Recluse (1939) by Bertram Brooker (1888–1955) was in an industrial frame that was visually detrimental to the painting. A stained wood frame was found in storage. It was given a simple treatment and reduced. The simplicity of the found frame and its humble finish were a better fit with the painting, drawing our attention to the work's dynamic composition rather than distracting us with superfluous ornamentation.

In some cases, we were able to reuse a frame with minimal intervention. Such was the case of *Corner Peel and Sainte-Catherine* (1948) by Adrien

Hébert (1890–1967). Although the acquisition report included a historical photograph of the painting in what seems to be its original frame, the MMFA acquired it in a narrow silver frame with a three-inch-wide linen liner. Its previous owner, Imperial Tobacco Canada, had probably reframed it in the 1990s, either to modernize the painting, make it seem more valuable, or simply to blend it into a specific environment. Paradoxically, this more recent frame stripped the painting of its historical context and detracted from the artist's innovative style and choice of subject matter (Fig. 5).

Hébert's painting just happened to be in the lab at the same time as Horatio Walker's *Lunar Eclipse* (1909). The frame on the Walker dated from the 1940s or 1950s. Its finish was spattered red paint and a bronzine on a grey base.¹⁴ It created such a negative visual impact on the Walker that it was put on the priority list of frames to be changed. The idea of transferring the Walker frame to the Hébert painting resulted from their chance meeting in the lab. It was tested and proved to be a perfect match – down to the millimetre!

A wonderful example of recycling is the use of leftover moulding to build new frames. Such was the case with a grand Victorian painting in our collection in dire need of attention. Relatively soon after the painting's completion in 1886, *Entrance to Dieppe Harbour* by James Macdonald Barnsley (1861–1929) was acquired¹⁵ by the MMFA. Such a short lapse of time between its execution and acquisition led us to believe that the painting was undoubtedly in its original frame when it entered the collection.¹⁶ However, this frame has since disappeared without a trace. For the past 30 years, the painting was exhibited in the galleries in a dark brown L-shaped frame. Although some visitors appreciated how the modest nature of the frame corresponded to the spirit of the humble scene depicted, it was aesthetically unsuited and not historically appropriate.

Options such as buying a period frame, having a reproduction made, or making one ourselves were solutions outside of our budget and time constraints, so we had to find a quick and economical solution. Long lengths of moulding¹⁷ were left over from our 2006 exhibition *Girodet, Romantic Rebel*. Although it was not period moulding, its imposing width and availability made it an acceptable framing solution.¹⁸

Conclusion

Interest in historical framing is growing: specialists and art lovers alike are showing enthusiasm for, and interest in, the topic.

The 2,000-square-foot Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion of Quebec and Canadian Art now houses more than two hundred and thirty paintings. Of all



6 | Newspaper clipping, James Macdonald Barnsley, *Entrance to Dieppe Harbour*, 1886, oil on canvas, 111.7 × 152.2 cm, 1911.4. Original Victorian frame. Possibly oil gilding (or bronzine) on composition ornaments and wood. Clippings compiled in the *Fine Arts Accession Book*, A–G, 1860–1976, archives department, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. (Photo: MMFA)

the frames surrounding these paintings, twenty-six have been restored while twenty-three others are replicas of historical frames or creations inspired by them. It took two years, or the equivalent of over 3,000 hours of work, by two interns, two technicians, and two frame conservators to reinvigorate this important part of the collection.

Unique frame designs have been created for our galleries, the new frames strongly influenced by period frames. We adapted ornament, line, and tone to aesthetically enrich our paintings, all the while keeping in mind that these choices could eventually be revisited. The most historically correct solution was always the intent.



7 | James Macdonald Barnsley, *Entrance to Dieppe Harbour*, 1886, oil on canvas, 111.7 × 152.2 cm (134.5 × 175 cm framed), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1911.4. Frame made in-house, created from recycled commercial moulding. Latex paint layers on wood with oil gilded liner. (Photo: Christine Guest, MMFA)

Assuming that the present trend toward period framing prevails, the tools we created and the resources we accessed will support the MMFA's future framing projects. Although there is no telling how the framing choices made for the 2011 opening of the Bourgie Pavilion will withstand changing trends, we are confident that our decisions were made with great respect for the history and geographical roots of a painting, within the constraints imposed by our budget and scheduling realities.

There are many factors to consider when making framing choices: historic layering, shifting provenance or geographic influences, aesthetic trends, and influences. And of course the decisions we made for the works in the Bourgie Pavilion can all be called into question. This being said, frames that were restored may have a chance of surviving future re-evaluations, whereas

some framing choices considered temporary solutions (the frame made for the Barnsley for example) will surely be replaced with more satisfying and historically adequate options. This is a good thing. It is stimulating to have an open and informed discussion about the frame's impact and influences and, in so doing, to recognize framing's place in art history. Researching and preserving the history of framing can only enrich the science and enjoyment of art.

NOTES

- 1 D. Gene KARRAKER, *Looking at European Frames* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2009), 62.
- 2 A great many Victorian frames of this period were discarded at the MMFA – especially between the 1960s and 1980s – and were often replaced by much simpler mouldings reflecting the more purified aesthetic of the times.
- 3 The bibliography for frames being extensive, here are the sources that have been most useful to the consultation team: Richard BRETTELL and Steven STARLING, *The Art of the Edge: European Frames 1300–1900* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1986); Gene D. KARRAKER, *Looking at European Frames: A Guide to Terms, Styles and Techniques* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2009); Eva MENDGEN, ed., *In Perfect Harmony: Picture and Frame 1850–1920* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 1995); Edward LANDON, *Picture Framing* (New York: American Artists Group, 1945); Paul MITCHELL and Lynn ROBERTS, *Frameworks: Form, Function and Ornament in European Portrait Frames* (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers Ltd., 1996); Mary E. MURRAY, Paul D. SCHWEIZER, and Michale D. SOMPLE, *Auspicious Vision: Edward Wales Root and American Modernism* (Utica, NY: Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, 2008); Eli WILNER, ed., *The Gilded Edge: The Art of the Frame* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000).
- 4 The gathered data – photographs and information pertaining to construction, state of conservation, and period – was organized by the sight sizes of the frames. This process revealed labels at the back of frames, allowing us to reunite some of them with their original paintings.
- 5 In the photographic database of the MMFA's collection, it is common practice to exclude the frame when shooting a painting.
- 6 First used in the early eighteenth century, composition (commonly named “compo”) was widely used in the Napoleonic period (1804–1815). An inexpensive and versatile material, “compo” became widespread during the Industrial Revolution and eventually replaced wood carved ornaments. It is composed of varying combinations of calcium carbonate, animal glues, colophony rosin, and linseed oil.
- 7 The frame was disassembled and the corners reinforced; the broken or lost ornaments were reconstructed with compo, and the finish's oxidation was removed to restore the tone of newly applied bronzine.
- 8 One of these conferences was “The Transforming Power of the Frame: Makers, Marriages and Materials – Exploring American Frames and Frames in America,”

organized by Initiatives in Art and Culture of the City University of New York in 2008.

- 9 It is interesting to note that our continuing interest in housing our paintings in period-correct frames made us realize how many travelling frames still surround paintings of various formats, periods, and styles in our collection today.
- 10 John PAYNE, *Framing in the Nineteenth Century: Picture Frames 1837–1935* (Australia: National Gallery of Australia and the Images Publishing Group, 2007), 272.
- 11 Decorators Supply Corporation, Chicago.
- 12 After much research and after consulting a file on the frames found on the artist's work, compiled by Jacques Des Rochers, we could construct a better idea of what direction we should take.
- 13 For example: Goodridge Roberts, *Still Life with Tablecloth*, 1949 (1998.76); Randolph Hewton, *Interior with Lady*, 1921 (1979.23); Frederick Varley, *Studio Door*, around 1953 (1959.1216); A.Y. Jackson, *Banks of a French Village*, 1909 (2011.191).
- 14 An inexpensive way to imitate worn gilding, this surface texture became commonplace on Canadian frames of the 1940s and 1950s. Surprisingly, it suits a great many Canadian paintings and was a particularly handsome match for this painting by Adrien Hébert.
- 15 The painting was acquired in 1911, from its first and only owner, twenty-five years after it was created. This leads us to believe that it had never been reframed.
- 16 We found proof in the curatorial file that it should be presented in a proper gilded Victorian frame through a photograph dating back to 1915–1920.
- 17 The profile's elegance and simple historical reference to the early nineteenth century made it perfect for our Barnsley project.
- 18 Its finish was adapted with layered and wiped latex paint to which we added a traditionally gilded liner to render a sense of craftsmanship and grandeur. With this modest solution, this great painting now has a more imposing, albeit not a historical frame, until the availability of sufficient resources permit a more appropriate match.

Contextualisation de la collection de tableaux québécois et canadiens du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal

SACHA MARIE LEVAY

En 2011, l'ouverture du Pavillon d'art québécois et canadien Claire et Marc Bourgie au Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal a fourni une rare occasion de réévaluer les cadres de certains tableaux importants de la collection du musée, qu'il s'agisse d'acquisitions récentes ou d'œuvres conservées depuis des années. Ce projet d'envergure a en effet nécessité environ 12 000 heures de travail pour la restauration de plus de 230 peintures aujourd'hui exposées dans le nouvel édifice de 2 000 pieds carrés. Quant aux cadres, il a fallu deux ans afin de restaurer, de transformer ou de remplacer les 49 d'entre eux qui figuraient sur la liste prioritaire, soit 26 restaurations et 23 créations, inspirées – ou répliques – de cadres historiques, qui ont contribué à revigorer cette partie essentielle de la collection.

D'ordinaire, les pratiques muséales en matière d'encadrement ont subi l'influence des attitudes changeantes à l'égard de la mode, de la société, de la religion, de l'économie ou du design affectant l'intérêt porté aux cadres eux-mêmes. Par conséquent, les perceptions de ce que constitue un cadre approprié ont considérablement évolué au fil du temps. Présentement, l'accent est principalement mis sur les considérations historiques et géographiques relatives à l'encadrement dans le but de contextualiser l'origine d'une œuvre. Des facteurs tels que la provenance, les tendances esthétiques historiques et géographiques ainsi que la participation de l'artiste aux décisions d'encadrement jouent à présent un rôle dans cette perspective.

Le présent article approfondit les questions transformatives qui entourent l'encadrement et aborde la manière dont ces facteurs ont été pris en compte dans l'organisation des nouvelles galeries. Nous examinerons les outils que nous avons élaborés et les ressources employées afin de parvenir à une combinaison de cadre et de peinture propre à la période visée. De même, les différentes solutions appliquées lorsqu'un changement s'avérait nécessaire seront décrites.

Notre intention était de toujours respecter – et, au besoin, de créer – un contexte historiquement et géographiquement cohérent pour les tableaux de la collection, et ce, en fonction des ressources financières, techniques et humaines alors disponibles ainsi que des contraintes d'horaire

qui s'imposaient. En tentant d'éviter les erreurs du passé en matière d'encadrement et en renforçant notre processus décisionnel, nous avons eu recours à une variété de ressources, notamment aux dossiers de conservation et de restauration du musée, publications, archives photographiques et consultations auprès de professionnels du domaine. Nous avons ainsi trouvé des solutions qui nous ont permis de nous conformer à notre budget et à notre calendrier, de même qu'à notre objectif de réalisation d'un encadrement d'époque. Au moyen d'une série d'études de cas, nous ferons la démonstration des solutions suivantes : restauration, création, collaboration, transformation et recyclage de matériaux existants.

La validité des considérations qui ont guidé nos décisions reste à établir, car la discussion sur l'encadrement au Canada ne fait que commencer. Une ouverture d'esprit quant aux choix passés et actuels en matière d'encadrement fera en sorte que la mine d'information intimement reliée au cadre soit conservée et puisse grandement contribuer à l'avancement et l'appréciation de l'histoire du cadre au pays.