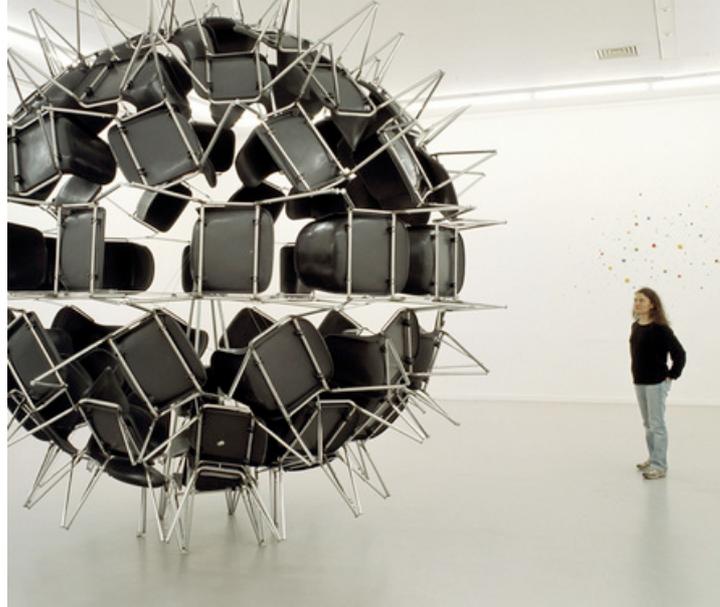


# The Quebec Triennial in Review: Provincial Powerhouse

MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL MAY 24 TO SEP 7  
2008

by ISA TOUSIGNANT



Michel de Broin *Black Whole Conference* 2006 Courtesy of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

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## Close Move

There are certain institutions that understand the covetable nature of art. Tate Modern, my favourite institution of all, is such a place: it's designed like a candy shop ready for a frenzied convoy of kids. Without dumbing anything down, nor overdesigning the environment with awful background colours or pop-appeal bullshit, it educates, elucidates and seduces by creating the perfect platform for its wares. It makes the art experience addictive—a viewer could visit 10 times and still feel the need for more, more, more.

Right now, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal does this too. For its biggest single exhibition yet, spreading through all rooms of its upper level (even the permanent collection space), the museum gathered its curating team and asked it to come up with the best Quebec has to offer. The result is the Quebec Triennial, the first of a series of exhibitions to occur every three years.

Art institutions in this country are often the victims of knee-jerk criticism, which in all fairness is the name of the game of public funding. Interestingly given the context of this show, the MACM has been accused of provincialism in the past. Not since the change of guard, mind you, when Marc Mayer took the helm in 2004. But in Marcel Brisebois's days an oft-recurring critique was that the museum's gaze was myopic and exclusive, promoting Quebec art to the detriment of international exposure. Since Mayer's arrival, the museum has expressed a concerted effort to internationalize its shows, and has brought in some of the biggest international names there are (albeit with a slight delay on "it factor," understandable given the MACM's humble

Canadian budget). In contrast to this distant and recent history, this show is a delightful mix of the old and the new. It brings the institution's attention back home. After all, there is no shame in being from Quebec! Okay, there's no money in the art market in this province. Compared to Toronto alone, Montreal has a pitiful market, so let's not even speak of Calgary, New York or Hong Kong. There's limited international recognition for Quebec artists, too, and that's certainly so for locals who don't emigrate because of that lack of commercial vigour.



Patrick Coutu *Pointe* 2005/6 Courtesy of Galerie René Blouin, Montreal

But take a look at the work produced by the 38 members of the new guard exhibited here: this is world-class art. There are absolutely fantastic pieces included here. Michael Merrill's series of paintings is referentially mind-bending and breathtaking. Manon de Pauw's video is so subtly sophisticated it's mesmerizing. David Altmejd's two towering sculptures confirm his status, while the grandiose installation by David Armstrong Six is a milky pool of bubbling madness. Adad Hannah's continuing series on the nature of the still image has never looked so sexy, while few artworks I've seen have had the political and educational power of Emanuel Licha's incredible video series *War Tourist*. Every which way you turn in the triennial, there's cause for excitement.

Each artist was given a very generous amount of space in which to spread themselves, so that while some included a single work, others exhibited whole series. It allows for a real immersion for the viewer, who, considering the youth of many of the participants, will likely be relatively unfamiliar with their work. Accompanied by informative labels, the works are given notable room to both breathe and shine. Clearly, the MACM has put all its eggs in the triennial basket, throwing its full—and mighty—support behind this beautiful province's next generation. All I can say is I've been five times and can't wait for my sixth. I wish this triennial was annual. (185 rue Ste-Catherine O, Montreal QC)