



Albright-Knox Art Gallery

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Collaboration Leads to Major Art History Events in Canada and the United States

Landmark Exhibition of Works by Canada's Avant-Garde Opens in Canada October 23, Travels to United States to be Shown with Works from the American Avant-Garde for the First Time

Buffalo, NY — On October 23, *The Automatiste Revolution, Montreal, 1941-1960*, a landmark exhibition of works by Canada's first avant-garde movement, will open at the Varley Art Gallery in Unionville, Ontario. It is one of the most extensive exhibitions to date of the Automatiste Group, whose work created what is recognized today as the most interdisciplinary and possibly the most important art movement in Canada. The Automatistes were the first artists to bring modernist painting to Canada and the first Canadian artists to embrace avant-garde gestural abstraction.

Before now, this group of artists and their work has been largely unknown outside Quebec. In March 2010, the exhibition will travel to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York. For the first time, this important work will be shown in a broader international context, with complementary works from the Albright-Knox's Permanent Collection of the contemporaneous United States avant-garde, the Abstract Expressionists, also on view. Major works by Jean-Paul Riopelle and Paul-Émile Borduas will be complemented in context with work by Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko from the internationally known collection of the Albright-Knox.

Guest curated by Roald Nasgaard, Professor of Art History at Florida State University, the exhibition in Canada will include sixty works of art, as well as photographs, books, and other ephemera documenting the history of the Automatiste movement. The complementary United States exhibition, organized by Albright-Knox Art Gallery Associate Curator Holly E. Hughes, will include major works from the Gallery's Permanent Collection designed to illuminate the connections and relationships between these Canadian artists and their American counterparts.

"They were the first Canadian artists to produce work that was contemporary with New York and Paris," said John Ryerson, Director of Culture for the Town of Markham. Louis Grachos, Director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, added, "The Gallery is looking forward to presenting the work of these remarkable artists, whose breakthroughs were parallel to, but entirely independent of, the simultaneous Abstract Expressionism movement in New York." Although a few of the Automatistes exhibited in New York and Paris during the 1940s and 1950s, they remain largely unknown outside Quebec.

The Automatistes gathered under the leadership of Paul-Émile Borduas in the early 1940s. They were inspired by stream-of-consciousness writings of the time and approached their works through an exploration of the subconscious.

The group of sixteen artists published *Le Refus global (Total Refusal)* in 1948. It became one of the pillars of the Quiet Revolution, a period of intense change in Quebec. *Le Refus global* was an anti-religious and anti-establishment manifesto—one of the most controversial artistic and social documents in modern Quebec. The Automatistes were not solely painters, but also included dancers, playwrights, poets, critics, and choreographers. After twenty years of challenging the politically and religiously repressive Quebec society, the Automatistes as a group disbanded in 1960 with the death of Borduas.

An accompanying publication, *The Automatiste Revolution: Montreal 1941–1960* (Douglas & McIntyre) has been co-authored by Roald Nasgaard and Automatiste historian Ray Ellenwood and includes sixty color reproductions of works in the exhibition. The exhibition and publication are supported by the Varley-McKay Art Foundation and private donors.

The exhibition will be on view at the Varley Art Gallery from October 23, 2009, through February 28, 2010. The gallery is presenting an ambitious schedule of events and public programs throughout the duration of the exhibition.

The exhibition and its complementary installation will open in the United States at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery on March 19, 2010, and remain on view through May 30, 2010.

The Albright-Knox Art Gallery is recognized as one of the world's leading collections of modern and contemporary art. With more than 6,500 works in its collection and a dynamic series of exhibitions and public programs, the AKAG continues to grow and fulfill its mission to acquire, exhibit, and preserve modern and contemporary art in an enriching, dynamic, and vibrant environment.

Hours: Thursday 10 am to 5 pm; Friday 10 am to 10 pm; Saturday and Sunday 10 am to 5 pm; closed Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. Admission: \$12 for adults; \$8 for seniors and students; free for Gallery Members and children 12 and under. On Fridays from 3 to 10 pm, *Gusto at the Gallery* features a variety of free programs for visitors of all ages. For additional information, visit www.albrightknox.org.

The Varley Art Gallery of Markham explores Canadian art themes with a particular focus on portraiture. It also operates the McKay Arts Centre for community artists and studio classes in Fred Varley's studio. The gallery is a 20-minute drive northeast of Toronto. It is open Tuesdays–Saturdays, from 10 am–4 pm and Sundays, from 12 noon–4 pm. For related programming, see www.varleygallery.ca.

Markham, a municipality of more than 285,000 residents centrally located in the Greater Toronto area, is Canada's most diverse community and home to many of Canada's leading life science and technology businesses. It is renowned for a rich heritage, vibrant neighborhoods, and leadership in the environment and urban design.

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