

A CHURCH-CUM-PAVILION

One man had long cherished the idea of acquiring a magnificent church next to the Museum. Bernard Lamarre admired the Erskine and American Church's massive stone architecture, grand nave, and opulent leaded-glass windows. He also knew of the financial difficulties facing the tiny congregation. To him it was inconceivable that this Montreal landmark should lose its role as a public space. Given its proximity and its own function, the Museum was the ideal institution to save the building, whose future seemed threatened.

Over the years, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts had grown. It had expanded, pavilion by pavilion, like a miniature city within the city. Its different buildings even offer a capsule history of Montreal architecture, beginning with the Maxwell brothers' classical temple in 1912, and continuing with the elegant Norton Addition in 1939, Lebensold's radical concrete geometry in 1976, and Safdie's light-filled monumental arch in 1991. When the passageway was dug under Sherbrooke Street to link the 1912 pavilion with the newly built Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion, Lamarre had had the foresight to ask for the plans to include a link with the church under Avenue du Musée.

Avenue du Musée is aptly named since on its west side are no less than four Museum buildings ascending the mountain in an unbroken line from Sherbrooke Street: the 1912 pavilion, the Norton Addition, the Liliane and David M. Stewart Pavilion, and

the house that used to contain the art school. The perimeter of the Museum is embellished by the Max and Iris Stern Sculpture Garden. Dr. Stern was a prominent figure in the Canadian art world. A German-Jewish immigrant, he had taken over the renowned Dominion Gallery and moved it to Sherbrooke Street, where he encouraged many young collectors, who fondly remember the proselytizing art dealer. Stern was interested in living Canadian artists, even introducing Montrealers to the work of Emily Carr. He also liked European modern art, the sculptures of Moore, Arp, and Rodin, whose imposing bronze sculpture had long graced the entrance to his gallery. The sculpture is a statue of Jean d'Aire, one of the Burghers of Calais who had heroically offered themselves up to the King of England to save their besieged city during the Hundred Years' War. In 2004, to pay tribute to this great patron and highlight his work, the Max Stern Foundation decided to fund the creation of a sculpture garden dedicated to Dr. Stern and his wife, Iris. For the garden, the Museum acquired Jim Dine's *Twin 6' Hearts*, which soon became an urban icon, commissioned a tranquil cow from Joe Fafard, put up Antony Gormley's "digital man" on the Avenue du Musée side, and installed Riopelle's humorous *Owl-Shovel* under a tree a little higher up the slope, in front of the Liliane and David M. Stewart Pavilion, and Vaillancourt's militant bronze *Homage to the Third World* by the sidewalk. Rodin's impressive burgher, on loan from the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, has returned to Sherbrooke Street, though it now stands in front of the Museum.

The Erskine and American Church faces the Sculpture Garden on the other side of Avenue du Musée. Montreal has long been known as "the city of a hundred steeples" thanks to the many churches of various denominations within its boundaries. Mark Twain famously remarked in 1881, "This is the first time I was ever in a city where you couldn't throw a brick without breaking a church window."¹⁰ And the number of churches kept on growing. Now, however, many of them need to be given a new use. The Erskine and American Church was deconsecrated in 2004, and in 1998 it was designated by the Canadian Heritage Department as being of national historic significance because of its remarkable architecture and history.

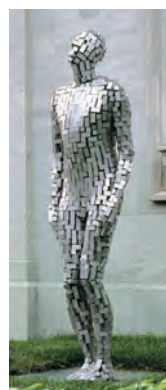
This history reflects the rise of Montreal's Scottish community. Associated with Presbyterianism, a reform religion that originated in Scotland in 1560,¹¹ the "Erskine"¹² Church was officially established in Canada in 1833. As the congregation prospered, they decided to build a new church in the affluent anglophone enclave known as the Square Mile, where many of its members lived. To design it, they selected a Montreal-born architect of Scottish descent, Alexander Cowper Hutchison (1838–1921). He would become one of the most prolific and prestigious architects in Victorian Montreal, being involved in the construction of such buildings as Montreal's City Hall and McGill University's Redpath Museum.



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Works in the Max and Iris Stern Sculpture Garden

1 Auguste Rodin
Jean d'Aire
1887 (cast 1966)
Bronze
Collection of Musée d'art
contemporain de Montréal,
gift of Dr. Max Stern, 2004

2 Jim Dine
Twin 6' Hearts
1999
Painted and patinated bronze,
artist's proof 7/6
Purchase, gift of International
Friends of the Montreal Museum
of Fine Arts, 2003

3 Antony Gormley
Building VI
2003
Stainless steel blocks
Purchase, Dr. and Mrs. Max Stern
Bequest, 2004

At right:
Yousuf Karsh
Stern in the Dominion Gallery
1985

Collector and Montreal art dealer
Max Stern presented numerous gifts
to the Museum. The Sculpture Garden,
opened in 2004 in collaboration
with the Max Stern Foundation,
pays tribute to him.



Every effort was made to build a church that would reflect the growing influence of this vibrant community. The architect and members of the building committee toured several churches in Canada (Toronto) and the United States (Detroit, Chicago, Akron, Washington, Brooklyn, and other cities). On these trips, Hutchison saw the work of the renowned American architect Henry Hobson Richardson, which would serve as an inspiration for the project. He also discovered Akron-style churches, which resembled vast auditoriums. The congregation opted for the Akron plan (p. 245, fig. 1-2), which was in keeping with the Presbyterian Church of Canada's practices, while distinguishing itself from the basilica plan associated with Catholic churches. The new building designed by Hutchison was inaugurated in 1893. It was built in the Romanesque Revival manner, based on the powerful, massive style of the early medieval European churches, and has a large square tower at one side over the main entrance. The exceptional character of its facade derives from the combination of rough-hewn grey limestone and richly carved brown Miramichi sandstone.

In 1925, the Erskine Church joined the United Church of Canada. Then, in 1934, the Erskine United Church amalgamated with another Presbyterian congregation, the American United Church, on Dorchester Street (now René-Lévesque Boulevard), to form the Erskine and American United Church. With the combined congregation, it became necessary to consider renovating, enlarging, and modernizing the building. These changes were initiated by William Massey Birks, of the well-known family of jewellers. Birks had a special interest in ecclesiastical architecture and had established the Committee on Church Architecture of the United Church of Canada in 1925. He was also an influential member of the Erskine and American's congregation. The interior layout of its church greatly displeased him. In a letter to the

minister, he recommended replacing the building, saying that "the latter is really not a church at all but an auditorium, between 40 and 50 years old, and a specimen of one of the worst periods in American architecture."¹³ However, in the wake of the Depression, the congregation decided instead to enlarge the existing building and considerably alter its interior.

The Erskine and American Church underwent significant modifications under the direction of the Scottish-born architect Percy Erskine Nobbs (1875–1964). Nobbs had spent his childhood in Russia and studied at the University of Edinburgh. He had come to Montreal in 1903 to head McGill University's school of architecture, where he was later appointed as a professor of design. He was a member of the Art Association of Montreal and in 1905 was one of the first to recommend that it establish a museum of decorative arts. A few years later, he participated in the design competition for the new Art Gallery on Sherbrooke Street, which was won by the Maxwell brothers. Nobbs is now considered one of the pre-eminent architects and professors of the first half of the twentieth century in Canada. In 1937–38, for remodelling the Erskine and American Church, he worked with George T. Hyde, with whom he had designed several buildings in the Arts and Crafts style on the McGill campus. They entirely redesigned the interior layout of the church and moved the community spaces to a new addition at the rear. They also built a narthex, added new Arts and Crafts furnishings and ornamentation, installed a Casavant organ, and incorporated into the building a unique set of leaded-glass windows.

Following the amalgamation of the Erskine and American churches, the building of the American United Church on Dorchester Street was demolished, but not before carefully preserving its exceptional set of twenty leaded-glass windows. The windows had originally been commissioned for the American Church's neo-Gothic building, constructed in 1865–66. There were four very large windows measuring 395 x 152 cm each, with the others measuring 190 x 63 cm. They had been produced in New York by the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company, mostly between 1897 and 1902,¹⁴ at the peak of the famous company's operations. Its founder, Louis Comfort Tiffany, had become internationally renowned for the spectacular light effects he could achieve with his blown-glass vases, leaded-glass windows, and multicoloured lamps. People loved their iridescent, shimmering, sparkling colours. Tiffany's passionate interest in glass and his flair for publicity quickly made him a leader in American design. The American Church's leaded-glass windows are one of only two commissions executed by the Tiffany studios for Canada and one of the rare religious series still in existence in North America. Tiffany had a team of craftsmen and designers working under him on this major collection of leaded-glass windows. At least five of the windows can be attributed with certainty to Frederick Wilson, the company's artistic director between 1897 and 1923,¹⁵ notably the impressive one depicting *The Good Shepherd*, a masterpiece of sensitivity and subtlety that still has the power to move the viewer.

The church's history is a history within that of the Museum, since the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has outgrown its home again, as the Board of Trustees is well aware. The Museum has no choice but to expand, for the sixth time in its history. The church will be given a new life by becoming part of the Museum's fourth pavilion. The Board had already anticipated that twenty years earlier and is now in a position to inaugurate the new pavilion in 2010—once again thanks to the generosity of a benefactor—to coincide with the Museum's 150th anniversary.



Réal Raymond
2004

President of the Museum Foundation since 2004, Réal Raymond played an important role in the campaign to raise funds for the Erskine and American Church project.

While Bernard Lamarre dreamt of acquiring the Erskine and American Church, another Montrealer, Pierre Bourgie, a lover of books, collector of contemporary art, and music enthusiast, fervently wished to put a deconsecrated Montreal church at the service of music. He wanted the public at large to be able to enjoy all types of music styles and ensembles in a place known for its excellent acoustics.

The two men had not yet made each other's acquaintance, but they were soon to discover that their dreams matched perfectly. Pierre Bourgie was a board member of the National Bank when it was chaired by Réal Raymond, the president of the Museum Foundation. Familiar with his friend's projects and himself very involved with the funding of the Museum's fourth pavilion, Raymond arranged for the builder and the music lover to meet. The contacts of both men with federal and provincial government officials added to the appeal of working together on a project. And so the Bourgie family and the Museum sat down together on several occasions to plan what would become the new pavilion.

The Museum's fourth pavilion, to be devoted to Canadian art, will be named the "Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion," as a tribute to Pierre Bourgie's parents. The Church's nave will become a space for educational and cultural activities, and will hold concerts beginning in 2010, providing a venue for Baroque ensembles and musicians from around the world. This "Musical Museum" that explores the links between music and the visual arts will further emphasize the Museum's multidisciplinary approach. Pierre Bourgie and his family are not only

contributing financially to the Canadian Art Pavilion, but they have also decided to create a private foundation to set up the new pavilion's music programming and sponsor its performers.

The acquisition of the Erskine and American Church will enable the Museum to carry out a truly original project, the only one of its kind in Canada: to preserve the status of a building designated as a "national historic site" by creating a Canadian Art Pavilion on one side, and a multi-purpose hall used mainly as a concert venue on the other. The former community space at the rear of the church will be replaced by a new building on Avenue du Musée. The firm of Provencher Roy + Associés architectes has been entrusted with the design of the addition. The founding associate of the firm, Claude Provencher, has a long-standing professional association with the Museum, having been involved in its programming and architectural development for over twenty-five years. His works in Montreal include the World Trade Centre, UQAM's Pavillon J.-A. De Séve, the Museum Collections Centre,¹⁶ and Université de Montréal's Pavillon J.-Armand Bombardier.

This addition to the church will finally make it possible to display all the Museum's extraordinary collections of traditional and modern Canadian art. The new galleries, the installation of which will be overseen by Jacques Des Rochers, curator of Canadian art, will double the exhibition space for these collections, which are currently dispersed throughout the pavilions and under-exhibited. Five floors will offer a coherent and continuous journey through Canadian art, from New France to *Refus global*. These galleries will also make it possible to highlight artists who are particularly well represented in the Museum's collections, such as Ozias Leduc, James Wilson

Morrice, Alfred Laliberté, Marc-Aurèle Fortin, Alfred Pellán, Paul-Émile Borduas, and Jean-Paul Riopelle. The collection of Amerindian art, and Inuit art in particular, one of the oldest in Canada, will be given a prominent position, finishing the visit at the top of the new pavilion. Several private, corporate, and government benefactors have also contributed to making this Canadian Art Pavilion possible.

The Museum's architectural evolution is fairly uncommon. Most North American and European museums occupy uniform, seamless spaces, often in a large park a little removed from the downtown core. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, however, developed as a series of separate buildings, or pavilions. This unusual concept has helped shape its personality and created its distinctive image. The Museum has always adapted to its ever-changing environment and managed to maintain each of the elements that make it what it is.

After the Erskine and American Church, there will necessarily be other projects. "The Museum is constantly expanding," says Bernard Lamarre. "This is as it should be. It shows that the Museum is vital and alive." In a few years, the Museum will no doubt be looking at further expansion possibilities.

And so the story continues.



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1 Claire and Marc Bourgie with their children, Pierre and Claude 2007

A significant gift presented by the Bourgie family will allow the Museum to have its fourth pavilion, which will integrate the Erskine and American Church.

2 Claude Provencher, architect 2006

Opposite:
Tiffany Studios, New York
Angel of the Resurrection
Leaded-glass window
About 1931
After a 1904 cartoon by
Frederick Wilson
The Erskine and American Church