

EXPRESSION: 20 YEARS AS A MUSEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

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In the 1980s, art lover Pierre Rodrigue began showing touring exhibitions from museological institutions at CEGEP Saint-Hyacinthe, where he was a social service worker. Later, he and art historian Francine Girard, a CEGEP teacher, developed a project to present shows on a regular basis and formed an exhibition committee. The founding members – Pierre Rodrigue, Francine Girard and head librarian Jacques Lefebvre – were soon joined by Yves Louis-Seize, an artist teaching continuing education classes. On November 28, 1984, at the suggestion of Louis-Seize, the organization was baptized EXPRESSION, Centre d'exposition de Saint-Hyacinthe, and the official opening took place on February 20, 1985.



The following year, a crucial report on the development of cultural facilities in the region south of Montreal was made public. The report pointed to a flagrant lack of suitable venues for the presentation and promotion of works by professional artists, and for hosting touring exhibitions, which the CEGEP could not adequately accommodate. When the City of Saint-Hyacinthe announced its intention to renovate the second floor of Marché Centre, the public market, EXPRESSION's promoters joined forces in an effort to have the exhibition centre move there. On July 6, 1987, shortly after Saint-Hyacinthe-born artist Lorraine Fontaine was named general and artistic director, the municipal government finally approved the proposed relocation.

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The first exhibition at EXPRESSION's new home, *Collection Loto-Québec. 10 ans déjà*, was held in July 1988, but the official inauguration took place only on November 13. That fall, Michel Groleau, founder of Galerie Noctuelle/Michel Groleau, took over as general and artistic director. In 1989, the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec (MCCQ) accredited the centre, making it part of the network of Quebec museological institutions.

In 1996 and again in 1999, EXPRESSION held the Sympo-Fibres international de Saint-Hyacinthe. Both editions of this major symposium event brought together ten artists using fibers in their work, from Quebec, elsewhere in Canada and abroad. In 1998, EXPRESSION received its first annual operating grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, under the Assistance to Art Museums and Public Galleries program. In March 2001, Michel Groleau stepped down, handing the organization's reins to Marcel Blouin.

In 2003, EXPRESSION presented ORANGE: Contemporary Art Event of Saint-Hyacinthe. This conference and residency event took place August 29-October 12 and involved eighteen Quebec, Canadian and foreign artists, all working around the agri-food theme.



In conclusion, it bears noting that in the MCCQ's assessment report on museological institutions for 2003-04, EXPRESSION is given an "A" rating.

