

Michel Goulet and the 400th anniversary of Québec City: An Ode to the New World

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Volume 52, Number 212, Supplement, Fall–October 2008

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/62093ac>

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Publisher(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (print)

1923-3183 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

De Julio-Paquin, J. (2008). Michel Goulet and the 400th anniversary of Québec City: An Ode to the New World. *Vie des Arts*, 52(212), 6–7.



Rêver le Nouveau Monde, 2008
Gare du Palais de Québec
Installation-sculpture
40 chairs
Stainless steel
Photo: Courtoisie Ville de Québec

QUÉBEC

MICHEL GOULET

and the 400th anniversary of Québec City

AN ODE TO THE NEW WORLD

Jean De Julio-Paquin

ON JUNE 14th IN QUÉBEC CITY, IN THE PRESENCE OF A LARGE NUMBER OF SPECTATORS, MICHEL GOULET INAUGURATED HIS PUBLIC ARTWORK *RÊVER LE NOUVEAU MONDE*. OFFERED BY THE CITY OF MONTREAL TO CELEBRATE THE 400th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF QUÉBEC CITY, THE AWARD-WINNING PIECE IS A GIFT COMMEMORATING THE LINKS OF FRIENDSHIP AND SOLIDARITY THAT UNITE THE NATIONAL CAPITAL WITH THE METROPOLIS.

Situated along the pedestrian corridor next to the Gare du Palais in the lower part of the city, *Réver le Nouveau Monde* is composed of forty stainless steel chairs installed in pairs and placed back to back, side by side or front to front. On each of the chairs, the sculptor engraved excerpts from the work of forty renowned Québec poets, from the time of the founding of Québec to the present day. Dated and marked with the name of the author, these chairs-poems are also chairs-memories, offering the viewer the pleasure of imagining the source, of contemplating it, and even of its re-contextualization.

Two chairs placed at an angle at the entrance facing a boulevard, are linked by a bronze element, representing a scaled-down image of the Saint Lawrence River flowing between Québec City and Montreal. According to Michel Goulet, this emblematic segment of water symbolizes the lifeline between the new land of America and the rest of the world. At the opposite end of the installation, two other chairs close the bracket. They are installed side by side, facing the entire ensemble of forty chairs. Under one of these chairs the viewer will find the Earth's globe and underneath the other, a replica of an old Québec house with a slanting roof and skylights. In the words of the sculptor, these two objects signify the opposing poles of a public and a private space. The spectators strolling along the corridor housing the installation become themselves players, whose role it is to "dream the New World", for this complex and demanding artwork cannot transmit its full message without the participation of the viewer.

While the chair is a recurring element in many of Goulet's sculptures, an involvement with literature and writing is a constant in his work.

He has engraved texts that in their entirety reflect the New World imagined by the soul and language of its poets, past and present. The choice was not easy. Following a lengthy research which included scouring anthologies of Québec poetry and academic manuals, 160 names were selected, and from those, forty were ultimately retained. The

process involved, on the one hand, covering 400 years of literary output, and on the other, keeping in mind the different poetic genres.

A reflection on the language leads to a reflection on thought and a dialogue with history. As the sculptor himself notes, the forty chosen excerpts and the names of their authors are as much historical and cultural artifacts as the archeological fragments buried beneath the installation site, representing the fragmented memory of our history. They present in a coherent way the themes tied with the evolution of the poetic language as well as the interpretation of history.

The work is accompanied by a publication, and all that is left is to allow our senses be seduced by this creation and its invitation to journey and to dream the new world.

□

THE 40 PARTICIPATING POETS:

Claude Beausoleil, Michel Bibaud, Nicole Brossard, Paul Chamberland, Cécile Cloutier, Leonard Cohen, Hugues Corriveau, Louise Cotnoir, Octave Crémazie, Jean-Paul Daoust, Normand de Bellefeuille, Denise Desautels, Alfred Desrochers, Kim Doré, Hélène Dorion, Louise Dupré, Madeleine Gagnon, St-Denys Garneau, Claude Gauvreau, Roland Giguère, Charles Gill, Gérald Godin, Alain Grandbois, Anne Hébert, Dany Laferrière, Gatién Lapointe, Irving Layton, Félix Leclerc, Marc Lescarbot, Paul Chanel Malenfant, Rita Mestokosho, Gaston Miron, Émile Nelligan, Pierre Nepveu, Emily Novalinga, Pierre Perrault, Joseph Quesnel, Jean Royer, Gilles Vigneault, Yolande Villemaire.



BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES:

Born in Asbestor, Michel Goulet is one of Québec's greatest sculptors. He has garnered numerous awards in his career, including the 2008 Governor General's Prize in the field of visual and media arts, and the 1990 Prix Paul-Émile Borduas. Also well known for his stage design, Michel Goulet has worked on theatrical projects in Québec, France and Switzerland. In 1993 he received the Prix de l'Association québécoise des critiques de théâtre for the best set design (for *Roberto Zucco*), and in 1994, l'Académie québécoise de théâtre presented him with a prize for the same project. In 1997, he received the Prix Gascon-Roux du Théâtre du Nouveau Monde for *Le Passage de l'Indiana* and, in 1999, the Mask for his set design for the play *Urfaust, tragédie collective*.

Michel Goulet has had over 30 exhibitions and participated in close to one hundred group shows. His works can be found in major national museums in Québec, as well as regional museums such as the Musée d'art de Joliette, the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke and Rimouski regional museum. Under the heading of public art, Michel Goulet has produced over 30 works in Québec, across Canada and in France. In 1988, he represented Canada at the Venice Biennale.