

## MONTREAL'S CULTURAL ACCESS NETWORK: LOCAL CULTURAL VENUES



Opening of the « De choses et d'autres ! » Exhibition by Samuel St-Aubin, Marie-Uguay House of Culture, BIAN 2014. Photo : Shanti Loïselle.

**culture community**  
**cultural mediation arts**  
**access artists local**

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### 1. Context

Municipal cultural distribution has been a part of the Island of Montreal for many years. Since the 1980's, several municipalities including Saint Lawrence, LaSalle and Saint Leonard have been providing their respective populations with artistic programs, focusing primarily on classic disciplines, such as theatre and popular music. They have also organised many exhibitions. In 1981, the first House of Culture was opened to the public. This led to the creation of several more Houses of Culture in different districts of Montreal.

Different elements of this idea were quickly defined. In terms of local facilities, resource centres were set up in different neighbourhoods. These are multi-functional and multi-disciplinary venues dedicated to professional cultural dissemination. In order to complement the other established cultural institutions, their aim was to provide a different type of program adapted to each neighbourhood's actual needs, free of charge. Their artistic choices were therefore crucially important for emerging artists and the latest or

emerging expressions of art. This consequently supported Montreal's cultural development and provided access to a diverse range of artistic proposals for a new clientèle. The summer distribution also included some well established institutions such as the 'de Verdure Theatre', the 'La Roulotte Theatre' and the Campbell Concerts.

*The network brings together municipal distributors rooted in their community who are equally as concerned about citizens as they are about artists; this has had a real impact on the whole population of the Island of Montreal.*

Through these actions, the city marked the first step in what would become a unique municipal initiative in terms of cultural access; it created a network for cultural distribution that we now know as 'Cultural Access'.

The Cultural Access Network now assembles 24 municipal distributors of stage art and visual arts. These distributors, who are scattered throughout 19 of Montreal's districts, provide citizens with a multidisciplinary program of professional shows. Many of whom also offer a program primarily focused on visual art exhibitions. *The network's strength lies in the specificities of each of its distributor's schedule of programs. These programs integrate citizens' interests, the expertise of existing teams and solid partnerships with social and cultural circles, as well as adapting to the venues and facilities available within the districts. The network brings together municipal distributors rooted in their community who are equally as concerned about citizens as they are about artists.*



Côte-des-Neiges House of Culture. Green roof.  
Photo: Ève Côté.



Hugo Bergeron, *Au bord du précipice, l'eau me semble plus froide*,  
2014, acrylic painting on canvas, City of Montreal Collection.  
Photo: Courtesy of the Graff Gallery

Several distributors have hosted or encouraged artistic residency projects to support the creative artistic process and to provide special meetings with citizens. Two distributors have hosted permanent residencies. Cultural mediation and its supporting activities are also part of what the distributors are providing, as they work towards expanding their audience and facilitating exchanges between artists and citizens. The network is carrying out around 50 mediation projects per year with professional artists and various groups and is providing citizens with diverse associated activities such as encounters with creators, workshops, conferences, animations and guided tours.

Moreover, wiser for the expertise of its distributors, Montreal City's Artwork Collection has initiated an original acquisition policy to showcase artistic productions produced by the Cultural Access Network: the acquisition of artworks project (PADORAC). This contributes to increasing the influence of artists from Montreal by displaying their work in municipal buildings, as well as in the most exclusive galleries and museums.

## 2. Montreal and Culture

- Montreal's cultural development policy.
- The municipal network's diagnosis of cultural diffusion for Montreal's Cultural Access program – September 2009
- Practical guides for holding exhibitions within the Cultural Access Network according to the rules – 2012
- 2012-2014 Plan of Action for the Cultural Access Network
- Increasing the sustainability of culture in neighbourhoods – Section 1 – Accompanying structure for the Cultural Access Network aimed at municipal distributors.



Cultural and Community House in North-Montreal.  
Photo: Caroline Durocher.



Neighbourhood party — Maisonneuve House of Culture.  
Photo: MC Maisonneuve.

### 3. Objectives and implementation of the project

In 2007, representatives from Montreal's different districts developed a shared mission to update and direct the municipal Cultural Access Network's cultural dissemination. *"In terms of cultural dissemination, the city and its districts are aiming to ensure that all citizens of Montreal have access to culture according to the principles of democracy and equality. They are also encouraging citizens to participate in cultural life and contribute to their neighbourhood's sense of vitality, as well as showcasing Montreal as a cultural metropolis."* This initiative then led to the adoption of Montreal's Cultural Development Policy.

The Cultural Access Network has:

- **24** cultural distributors;
- **60** resource centres;
- **80** people dedicated to dissemination;
- **200** exhibitions per year;
- **2,000** shows per year;
- **Thousands** of artists;
- **600,000** spectators and visitors per year.

*These programs integrate citizens' interests, the expertise of existing teams and solid partnerships with social and cultural circles.*

### 4. Impacts

The network's strength lies in the specificities of each of its distributor's schedule of programs. These programs integrate citizens' interests, the expertise of existing teams and solid partnerships with social and cultural circles, as well as adapting to the established venues and facilities within the districts. The network brings together municipal distributors rooted in their community who are equally as concerned about citizens as they are about artists; this has had a real impact on the whole population of the Island of Montreal. It is a unique network within North America and within the world!



Daniel Oslon — Mediation during the *Gare aux gorilles* exhibition in the Côte-des-Neiges House of Culture, 2012.

Photo: Anne-Marie Beaulieu.

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## 5. Other information

Montreal's Cultural Access Network website: [accesculture.com](http://accesculture.com)

Youtube Channel: [youtube.com/user/accesculture](https://www.youtube.com/user/accesculture)

Cultural Access Facebook, Montreal: [facebook.com/accesculture](https://www.facebook.com/accesculture)

Twitter: [@accesculture](https://twitter.com/accesculture), [twitter.com/accesculture](https://twitter.com/accesculture)

Montreal's cultural mediation website: <http://montreal.mediationculturelle.org/>

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