

ICEBERG BLUES,
AN ICONIC WORK BY EDMUND ALLEYN
UNVEILED AT THE MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



Montreal, May 26, 2016 – The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) is presenting an installation around *Iceberg Blues*, a work by Edmund Alleyn (1931-2004), as a complement to the retrospective at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (MAC) devoted to this multidisciplinary Quebec artist.

Exhibited for the first time in close to thirty years, *Iceberg Blues* (1973-1975) is part of a series entitled “Une belle fin de journée” [A Fine End of the Day], which Alleyn created upon his return to his native Quebec after living in France for fifteen years. “Upon his return from Europe in 1971, my father rediscovered the people he had left behind fifteen years earlier. Painting their portraits from photos helped him settle back in to life in Quebec. It was a way, he said, of ‘immigrating’ home,” recounted his daughter, Jennifer Alleyn.

Nathalie Bondil, the MMFA’s Director and Chief Curator, explained: “Jennifer Alleyn, a long-time Museum collaborator, spontaneously offered to present this iconic work, which is still relevant today, in connection with the MAC retrospective and to thank us for the complex restoration carried out on the acquisition of *Big Sleep* (1968). To round out the presentation, Jennifer lent us video, graphic and photographic documents that illustrate the artist’s creative process.”

***Iceberg Blues* (1973-1975)**

“Visitors will have the great pleasure of discovering this captivating work, which is rooted in a very specific time and place and yet remains highly accessible and relevant today. It is accompanied by an excerpt from Jennifer Alleyn’s award-winning film *L’atelier de mon père* that documents the genesis of *Iceberg Blues* and provides an intimate portrait of Edmund Alleyn,” said **Anne Grace**, Curator for Cultural Education.

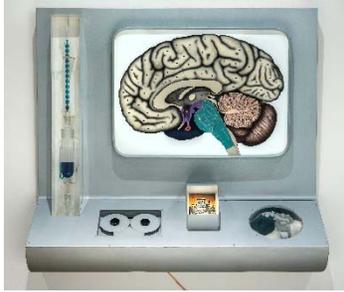
Installed on Level S2 of the MMFA’s Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion, the installation is accompanied by two other works on Plexiglas, *Girl with Balloon* and *Father and Sailor Son*, photographic sources and a preparatory drawing for *Iceberg Blues*, as well as an excerpt of an interview from the film *L’atelier de mon père* (2008) by his daughter, filmmaker, photographer and author Jennifer Alleyn.

Like a *tableau vivant* that is at once familiar and disconcerting, *Iceberg Blues* presents life-size characters on large Plexiglas panels, a relatively new synthetic material at the time. “Living in Paris for fifteen years, you have another perception of the world. In densely populated countries, personal space is limited, you never see human beings in their entirety. Unlike here, where you always see people head to toe. Such notions don’t have much to do with painting, but they are more interesting to me than those that have everything to do with painting!” wrote the artist.

The painted figures in *Iceberg Blues*, like all thirty-two in the series “Une belle fin de journée,” were based on photographs the artist took at the Montreal amusement park La Ronde in 1972 and 1973. The figures’ clothing and accessories, featuring an array of contrasting polka dots, floral patterns, team numbers and stripes, betray their eagerness to embrace the carefree atmosphere offered by that landscape of popular culture. The blue veil of the setting sun – a reminder of the end of another day and, in Montreal, the brevity of summer – casts a gloom over the scene, transforming it into a modern-day *memento mori*.

Iceberg Blues was shown as part of *Québec 75/Arts*, a series of exhibitions presented by the Institut d’art contemporain de Montréal in 1975, and in the MMFA’s exhibition *Forum76* the following year. The work was also presented in the exhibition *Montréal maintenant* at the London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario, in 1977.

***Big Sleep* (1968): A Work Acquired and Restored by the MMFA and Unveiled at the MAC**



The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts undertook a major restoration of the work *Big Sleep* (1968), which was acquired in 2008. Today, it is being presented for the first time since 1999 at the MAC in the exhibition *Edmund Alleyn: In My Studio, I Am Many*.

“Big Sleep is a mural relief that incorporates technological elements like a reel-to-reel audio tape, a 35mm slide carousel and an incandescent lamp matrix with an integrated switching system.

The challenge presented by this restoration project involved the emulation of these electromechanical elements and obsolete technology through a migration to a digital format that would ensure the work’s longevity and function,” explained **Richard Gagnier**, Head of Conservation at the MMFA.

In the MMFA’s Collection

The MMFA’s collection features **fifteen works** by Edmund Alleyn, including *The Traveller* (1959), an oil on canvas on view in the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion of the MMFA. Two other works in the Museum’s collection are currently on loan to the MAC for their retrospective: the multimedia installation *Big Sleep* (1968) and the painting *Invitation to the Voyage* (1989-1990).

A Short Biography of Edmund Alleyn

Born into Quebec City’s Anglo-Irish community in 1931, Edmund Alleyn attended the École des beaux-arts in Quebec City, where he studied alongside painter Jean Paul Lemieux. In 1958, he was part of the Canadian delegation to New York’s Guggenheim International Award. The following year, he won a bronze medal at the Sao Paulo Biennial and represented Canada at the Venice Biennale. From 1955 to 1970, he lived in France, where the non-figurative paintings from his early career gave way to figuration. While his early works reveal the influence of the West Coast First Nations, his later works mirror his interest in science and technology.

Upon his return to Quebec in the early 1970s, Alleyn was struck by the changes that had taken place during his absence, as seen in his artwork of the period. During the 1980s, he created extremely personal works, like the “Indigo” series. In 1996 and 1997, the Musée du Québec and the Musée d’art de Joliette presented the retrospective *Les horizons d’attentes 1955-1995*. At the Musée de Sherbrooke in 2004, he exhibited his final series, “Les Éphémérides.”

The artist died in Montreal in 2004.



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About the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

The MMFA welcomes a million visitors each year. Quebec's most visited museum, it is one of the most popular museums in Canada and ranks twelfth among art museums in North America. Its innovative temporary exhibitions combine artistic disciplines (fine arts, music, film, fashion and design) and are circulated to museums around the world. Its encyclopedic collection, which is on display in four – soon-to-be five – pavilions, includes international art, world cultures, decorative arts and design and Quebec and Canadian art. The Museum complex includes a 444-seat concert hall. The MMFA is also one of Canada's leading publishers of art books in English and French, which are distributed internationally. The Michel de la Chenelière International Atelier for Education and Art Therapy, the largest educational complex in a North American art museum, will be housed in the future Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion for Peace, which will be inaugurated in November 2016.

Photos:

Edmund Alleyn, *Iceberg Blues*, 1973-1975, acrylic and oil on canvas, acrylic on Plexiglas. Private collection. Photo MMFA, Christine Guest

Edmund Alleyn, *Big Sleep*, 1968, wood, glass, acrylic, thermoplastics, metallic-finish alkyd paint, acrylic paint, liquid ink, colour slide projections, incandescent light, sound. MMFA, gift of Anne Cherix-Alleyn and Jennifer Alleyn. Photo MMFA, Christine Guest