Montreal, October 3, 2018 – What constitutes, creates and advances our cultural identity? The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) will be presenting works to spark reflection on this question in *Connections: Our Artistic Diversity Dialogues with Our Collections*. This exhibition presents the commissioned works of seven emerging Canadian artists from culturally diverse communities. Inspired by the MMFA’S world cultures collections, their creations will be integrated into the new Stéphan Crétier and Stéphany Maillery Wing for World Cultures and Togetherness, set to open its doors in summer 2019.

Organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, this exhibition is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts’ New Chapter program.

“While we await the inauguration of the Stéphan Crétier and Stéphany Maillery Wing for World Cultures and Togetherness, seven commissions to artists from our cultural diversity are revealed in this installation. At the heart of a humanist art museum, in one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Canada, this wing will promote a multipolar perspective beyond the classical discourse of art history. Interculturality fosters exchanges and encounters, as it does in our collections. In the context of our ever more culturally mixed society, the Museum is an ideal forum for a diplomacy where cultures can dialogue,” said Nathalie Bondil, the Museum’s Director General and Chief Curator.

**The selected artists**

Arwa Abouon, Maria Ezcurra and Nuria Carton de Grammont, Brendan Fernandes, Hua Jin, Karen Tam, Pavitra Wickramasinghe and Z’otz* Collective were invited to create a work to initiate a transhistorical and contemporary dialogue on the topic of the MMFA’s collections of world cultures, with a focus on African,
Asian, Middle Eastern and Pre-Columbian art. Each work and installation created on the theme of cultural fluidity and a continually renegotiated identity is presented next to the work from the permanent collection that influenced the artist. (See the descriptions of the works and artists’ biographies enclosed.)

“Given that our collections are essentially composed of objects acquired from Western collectors, they offer but a partial reflection of the artworks’ cultures of origin and are often associated with visions of exoticism and rarity rather than cultural representativeness. Therefore, inviting artists from culturally diverse communities to reappropriate the world cultures collections by creating and exhibiting selected works makes way for a cultural recontextualization that is both imaginative and inclusive,” explained Laura Vigo, principal curator of the exhibition and Curator of Asian Art at the Museum. Without erasing the past, this approach highlights the rapprochements between peoples and the many cultural hybrids that are part of today’s world.

The exhibition Connections: Our Artistic Diversity Dialogues with Our Collections continues the theme of the exhibitions From Africa to the Americas: Picasso Face-to-Face, Past and Present and Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art, on display at the MMFA until September 16, 2018, which also encourage reflection on questions of cultural diversity.

“The Canada Council for the Arts is proud to support the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts’ Connections exhibition through its New Chapter program. With New Chapter, the Council is funding over 200 exceptional projects in communities across Canada and abroad, creating a lasting legacy for all Canadians. For us, art is essential in pointing us, together, toward a brighter future,” said Simon Brault, Director and CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts.

**Impressions Artist Residency**

In addition to the seven commissioned works, visitors will be able to admire two installations that were created at the MMFA in recent editions of Impressions Artist Residency: the works created by artists Ari Bayuaji, a Montrealer born in Indonesia and winner in 2016-2017, and Karen Tam, of Chinese descent and winner in 2017-2018.

The Museum is collaborating again with the Conseil des arts de Montréal on the sixth edition of Impressions. In this eight-week artist residency, the MBAM will opens its doors and reserves to an artist from one of Montreal’s cultural communities or to a First Nations, Inuit or Métis artist. The deadline for the call for applications is October 9, 2018.

**Artists talks**

Led by Geneviève Goyer-Ouimette and Laura Vigo, exhibition curators

**FEBRUARY 20, 2019 – 5 p.m.**

With Nuria Carton de Grammont and Maria Ezcurra

**MARCH 20, 2019 – 5 p.m.**

With Hua Jin and Pavrita Wickramasinghe

**APRIL 17, 2019 – 5 p.m.**

With Ari Bayuaji and Karen Tam
Credits and Curatorial team
An exhibition organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. This is one of 200 exceptional projects funded through the Canada Council for the Arts’ New Chapter program. With this $35 million investment, the Canada Council for the Arts supports the creation and sharing of the arts in communities across Canada.

The exhibition is curated by Laura Vigo, Curator of Asian Art, MMFA; in collaboration with Erell Hubert, Curator of Pre-Columbian Art, MMFA; Geneviève Goyer-Ouimette, Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Curator of Quebec and Canadian Contemporary Art from 1945 to Today, MMFA; and Valerie Behiery, arts writer and independent scholar. Under the direction of Nathalie Bondil.

Acknowledgements
These commissions assigned to emerging artists received support from New Chapter, a program created by the Canada Council for the Arts to mark the 150th anniversary of Confederation. The seven works commissioned from Canadian artists representing diversity dialogue with our collections. They will be displayed in the MMFA’s new Stéphan Créter and Stéphany Maillery Wing for World Cultures and Togetherness in the summer of 2019.

The Museum acknowledges the vital contribution of Air Canada and the Young Philanthropists’ Circle of the MMFA, proud to support the contemporary art program of the Museum. The Museum extends its thanks to Quebec’s Ministère de la Culture et des Communications and the Conseil des arts de Montréal for their ongoing support.

Download high-resolution images here.

Press Room: mbam.qc.ca/en/press-room

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About the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
Boasting more than 1.3 million visitors annually, the MMFA is one of Canada’s most visited museums and the eighth-most visited museum in North America. The Museum’s original temporary exhibitions combine various artistic disciplines – fine arts, music, film, fashion and design – and are exported around the world. Its rich encyclopedic collection, distributed in its five pavilions, includes international art, world cultures, decorative arts and design, and Quebec and Canadian art. The Museum has seen exceptional growth in recent years with the addition of two new pavilions: the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion, in 2011, and the Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion for Peace, in 2016. The MMFA complex includes Bourgie Hall, a 460-seat concert hall. The MMFA is one of Canada’s leading publishers of art books in French and English, which are distributed internationally. The Museum also houses the Michel de la Chenelière International Atelier for Education and Art Therapy, the largest educational complex in a North American art museum, enabling the MMFA to offer innovative educational, wellness and art therapy programmes.

mbam.qc.ca
SELECTED ARTISTS

Arwa Abouon
Born in Tripoli, Libya, in 1982, living in Montreal

When Canadian artist Arwa Abouon’s family immigrated to Canada, Arwa was just a year old. Growing up in Montreal, she self-identified as Québécoise, while the culture in her family home was Libyan and Amazigh, thus blurring and complexifying her sense of identity. Abouon’s native roots and tribal and family lineage, which she learned about through her parents and family photo albums, are also deeply engrained in her, as revealed in the themes of her artmaking. The negotiation of a plural identity effectively constitutes the conceptual core of Abouon’s work. This “unhomed,” nomadic existential experience, while undoubtedly uncomfortable, has given rise to a cultural and an aesthetic multilingualism capable of speaking across boundaries erected by socio-political discourses on race, religion and even global strife. Achieving a sense of belonging as a perpetual outsider who belongs both everywhere and nowhere requires love and compassion. Because these alone can heal social divisions and personal wounds, they are central to Abouon’s borderless, autobiographical art.

Arwa Abouon is a Libyan Canadian of Amazigh descent who grew up in Montreal, where she still lives and works. Abouon obtained a BFA (with distinction) from Concordia University. She is a contemporary Muslim artist who explores issues of identity and the different ways we transmit knowledge from one generation to another. Represented by the Third Line Gallery in Dubai, her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums around the world, including at the Marta-Herford Museum (Suspended Territories) in Germany and the Athr Gallery in Jeddah (Letters). Her work forms part of several private and public collections such as the Institut du Monde Arabe, Rose Issa Projects and Concordia University.

arwaabouon.com

Maria Ezcurra and Nuria Carton de Grammont
Born in Argentina in 1973, living in Montreal
Born in Mexico in 1978, living in Montreal

Personal Belongings is the fruit of a collaboration between artist Maria Ezcurra, who frequently explores the mental, physical and emotional ramifications of emigration in her work, and Nuria Carton de Grammont, an art historian specialized in Latin American and Latino Canadian contemporary art. This project looks at personal and cultural identity through the lens of memory, belonging and migration. Twenty-one Quebecers who emigrated from 21 countries across the Americas tell their stories through a personal object that played an important part in their immigration process. Bringing these testimonials together on an interactive platform, the artists invite us into the journey of members of the Latin American and Caribbean communities, as told in their own words. In doing so, they involve the participants in the decision-making process that determines the narrative of their histories and cultural identities. By establishing a dialogue between the contemporary objects presented by the participants and the objects of the Museum’s collection, this project reveals the personal, artistic and sacred value and the journey of each item – two elements that are often unknown in archaeological objects.

Maria Ezcurra (www.mariaezcurra.com) is an artist and educator born in Argentina (1973), raised in Mexico and currently living in Canada. She has participated in numerous exhibitions worldwide, including solo
shows in the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City, Nuit Blanche in Toronto and several galleries and art spaces in Montreal. A recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Fulbright-Garcia Robles Scholarship and the FRQSC award, Ezcurra is also a member of the National System of Art Creators in Mexico. She obtained a PhD at Concordia University with the first research-creation doctoral project presented at the Department of Art Education. She has worked as a teacher at a number of universities in Mexico and Canada over the past 15 years. She was one the first artists in residence with McGill’s Faculty of Education, where she is currently working as an art facilitator with the McGill Art Hive Initiative and the P. Lantz Artist-in-Residency Program.

Nuria Carton de Grammont is an art historian, curator and lecturer at Concordia University who specializes in Latino-American and Latino-Canadian contemporary art. She completed a doctorate in art history at Concordia and two postdoctoral degrees at the Montreal Centre for International Studies and the geography department of Université de Montréal, where she also coordinated the Réseau d'études sur l'Amérique latine. She has participated in many conferences and published a number of articles in Artediseño, Oltreoceano. Rivista sulle migrazioni, Les Cahiers ALHIM, Fractal, Esse arts + opinions, Inter, art actuel and Archée, along with co-editing Politics, Culture and Economy in Popular Practices in the Americas (Peter Lang, 2016). As a curator, she presented the exhibition Gilberto Esparza. Plantas autofotosintéticas at Galerie de l’UQAM (2017). She was honoured with the Marcos y Celia Maus award (2004-2005) by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

**Brendan Fernandes**
Born in Nairobi in 1979, living in Chicago

Brendan Fernandes explores the transitional and hybrid nature of identity, an interest that stems from his own experience as a Canadian artist of Kenyan and Indian descent. In his artistic practice, he often uses African objects from museums. The lost traces of their provenance raises questions about their authenticity and casts a light on their colonial past. In this installation, the artist establishes an analogy between the history of these objects and his own journey. A former dancer, Fernandes is interested in the importance of the body in expressing cultural identity, and he turns to choreography as the universal experiential language. In *Lost in Display*, he explores the absence of performance gestures associated with African masks. In museums, the bodies of dancers are left out, the masks themselves displayed immobile, alienated from the cultural traditions that gave them life. Using virtual reality, Fernandes invites us to participate in the masquerade with filmed dancers in order to reconnect the masks with their gestural vocabulary and recreate the bodily experience.

Brendan Fernandes (b. 1979, Nairobi, Kenya, lives and works in Chicago) is a Canadian artist of Kenyan and Indian descent. He completed the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art (2007) and earned his MFA from the University of Western Ontario (2005) and his BFA from York University in Canada (2002). Fernandes has exhibited widely both domestically and abroad, including exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Art and Design, New York; The National Gallery of Canada; The Brooklyn Museum, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA: The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA; Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The Sculpture Center, New York; The Quebec City Biennial; and the Third Guangzhou Triennial in China. He is currently artist in residence and faculty member at Northwestern University's department of art theory and practice, and is represented by Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

[brendanfernandes.ca](http://brendanfernandes.ca)
Hua Jin
Born in Hebei, China, in 1976, living in Montreal

In her exploration of the existential transience of time, life and material things, Chinese-Canadian Hua Jin reveals her preoccupation with the dissipation of culture threatened by globalization, mass production and the depletion of the natural environment. Inspired by the Museum’s Chinese underglaze cobalt blue porcelains, Jin created twelve plates that bridge the past and the present. To the keen observer, the work draws attention to the environmental, cultural and spiritual sacrifices made by China in the name of economic development. Each plate bears a different laser-printed traditional motif, which has been blurred and faded. While referencing Chinese tradition, the fading emphasizes the idea of disappearance and transformation. Disappearing are not only the original motifs associated with ancient China but, more poignantly, the craftsmanship, traditional culture, actual natural landscapes and once harmonious relationship between humans and nature. While the ancient underglaze blue porcelains may have represented the luxurious exotica sought by Western collectors, Jin’s modern kitchenware represent the mass production of contemporary China, forever catering to Western consumerism.

Hua Jin is a Montreal-based visual artist based who has exhibited her works worldwide. She received her MFA degree from Concordia University and her BFA from Emily Carr University in Vancouver. Her works are included in many publications and collections, including the public collection of Museum of Contemporary Art in Shanghai. Jin has received the Research and Creation Grant both from Canada Council for the Arts and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. She is also the recipient of the CAC’s International Residency Award and Professional Development for Artists. She was named an emerging artist in the 2012 Vancouver Mayor’s Arts Awards and winner of the Canadian SnapStar photo competition. She received first place in the Canon Photography Awards in her Emily Carr graduate exhibition.

huajinart.com

Karen Tam
Born in Canada in 1977, living in Montreal

Chinese-Canadian Karen Tam is known for the subversive sense of humour with which she explores themes of migration, identity and cultural dissimulation. Tam is also interested in the Museum’s collection of Export Chinese ceramics, and her artworks brilliantly address tropes by representing a certain idea of “Chineseness” while challenging our arbitrary representation of other cultures and their commodification. In the early eighteenth century, Japanese Imaristyle vessels were made in China to meet rising Western demand. Inspired by a set of such vessels in our collection, Tam’s seven triple-gourd style vases mimic traditional decoration using sequins and Styrofoam. But rather than depicting birds, Karen chose crawling insect mimics that take on the appearance of other insects in order to blend into their surroundings and fool predators or prey. In reference and contrast to the mass production of goods in China, both genuine and fake, Tam’s vases are made in the labour - and time - intensive process of pinning each sequin to the vase by hand – an exercise that takes between one and three months to complete.

Karen Tam is an artist whose research focuses on the various forms of constructions and imaginations of cultures and communities, through her installation work, in which she recreates spaces of Chinese restaurants, karaoke lounges, opium dens, curio shops and other sites of cultural encounters. Since 2000, she has exhibited her work and participated in residencies in North America, Europe and China, including the Deutsche Börse Residency at the Frankfurter Kunstverein (Germany), Musée d’art contemporain de
Montréal and CUE Art Foundation (USA). She was a finalist for the 2017 Prix Louis-Comtois awarded by the Contemporary Art Galleries Association and the Ville de Montréal, a finalist for the Prix en art actuel from the Musée national des beaux-arts de Québec in 2016, and long-listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2016 and 2010. Her works are in museum, corporate and private collections in Canada, United States and United Kingdom. Tam lives and works in Montreal and holds a MFA in sculpture from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a PhD in cultural studies from Goldsmiths (University of London). She is a contributor to Alison Hulme (ed.), The Changing Landscape of China’s Consumerism (2014) and to John Jung’s Sweet and Sour: Life in Chinese Family Restaurants (2010).

karentam.ca

Pavitra Wickramasinghe
Born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1980, living in Montreal

In exploring the Museum’s Asian collection, Sri Lankan-Canadian Pavitra Wickramasinghe was drawn to a modest object, a Sawankhalok tea caddy dated to the sixteenth century. Originally created in Thailand as a perfumed-oil jar, this object got shipped to Japan where it was recycled into the tea ceremony as a powdered-tea container. The way in which the jar adapted to a new place – identity and use reinvented – resonated with the artist’s work on migration, translation and islands. The caddy’s wondrous journey reflects the movement of commerce, culture, tradition and religion. Wickramasinghe captures the essence of translation and transformation brought on by migration through an imaginary landscape conjured up by projecting the shadows of a series of sculptures onto a panoramic screen. Placed on turntables, the sculptures’ shadows continuously morph and evolve, each one deconstructing the tea caddy visually as well as metaphorically, thus exploring the original in shape, material and ornamentation. Although the sculptures reference the original prototype, their forms also venture beyond it, playing with the idea of ever-evolving transformation. The artist urges us to question what is lost, gained and morphed in the translation.

Pavitra Wickramasinghe is a multidisciplinary artist mainly concerned with new ways of conceptualizing the moving image and conventions of seeing. Her current work is an exploration of notions of traveling, fluidity of place and memory. She uses light and shadows as extensions of the projected image to create installations where the viewer occupies filmic space instead of being physically removed from the work. Selected exhibitions include OBORO (Montreal), Kunst Kraft Werk (Germany), SIGHTINGS, Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery (Montreal), Yeosu International Art Festival (South Korea), Centre des Arts Enghien-les-Bains (France), Cable Factory (Finland), Centro Cultural del Matadero (Spain) and Galerie B-312 (Montreal). She is a recipient of numerous residencies, awards and grants including, Art Omi (NY), La Chambre Blanche (Quebec), Pépinières Européennes pour jeunes artistes (Spain), UNESCO-Ashberg Bursaries for Artists Programme, Changdong Art Studio, National Museum of Contemporary Art (South Korea), Canada Council for the Arts and The Claudine and Stephen Bronfman Fellowship in Contemporary Art. Pavitra’s first public art project Frontière is in the Quartier des spectacles collection, Montreal.
pavitraw.com
Z’otz* Collective
Formed in Toronto in 2004

Formed in Toronto in 2004, Z’otz* Collective is composed of artists Nahúm Flores, Erik Jerezano and Ilyana Martínez. The trio’s work is characterized by a collaborative, playful and intuitive energy as well as by the connection the object creates between the respective unconsciouses of its members. Each of their ceramic sculptures starts with a piece of clay, a desire to be surprised throughout the creative process and a symbolic animal as inspiration for exploring notions of mutation and transformation. Z’otz Collective’s attachment to its Latin American roots is manifested firstly in its name, zotz, the Mayan word for the animal bat, as well as in the group’s work with clay and their choice of subjects, which are often inspired by Mesoamerican legends. For example, with the nahuales – Aztec mythological characters – the artists make reference to the animal spirit and the power of shamans. By representing hybrid beings, objects and elements of flora and fauna in transition, they evoke the evolution, migration, regeneration and ambiguity of our animate and inanimate worlds to great emotional effect.

Z’otz Collective (Nahúm Flores, Erik Jerezano, Ilyana Martínez) formed in Toronto in 2004. For over a decade, Z’otz Collective has worked out of a shared studio in Toronto and has exhibited in galleries and artist-run centres across Canada, the US, Mexico and Europe. They have attended residencies in Croatia and Serbia, where they began working with ceramic sculpture. In 2013, the group exhibited at Dunlop Art Gallery (Regina) and Union Gallery (Kingston). They exhibited and led workshops in Orleans Gallery (Ottawa) and were invited to create a mural for the PanAm Path, coinciding with the 2015 PanAm Games in Toronto. All three members have been awarded grants from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation (NY) for their individual practices. The group collaborates on multimedia works, including drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, and site-specific installations. Their quirky and often outrageous images take a humorous look at ideas of transition, displacement and transformation. The works connect to their own storytelling traditions, with mythological beings and symbols that transition between the individual and the collective.

zotzcollective.blogspot.com