



For immediate release

FRÉDÉRIC BACK: ONE WITH NATURE

AN ARTIST WITH A POWERFUL MESSAGE AT THE MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Montreal, June 16, 2009 – In connection with the exhibition *Expanding Horizons: Painting and Photography of American and Canadian Landscape 1860-1918*, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is presenting *Frédéric Back: One with Nature*, from June 18 to September 27, 2009. The Museum believes it is the ideal time to present the outstanding work of this artist, painter, illustrator and filmmaker who, through his images and his films, tirelessly endeavours to make the public aware of the beauty of nature and the importance of protecting it. “By its very theme, the exhibition *Frédéric Back: One with Nature*, has provided our organization with an opportunity to underscore our commitment to protecting the environment and making our contribution to the Montreal community’s efforts in that direction,” points out Nathalie Bondil, Museum Director.

An environmental activist before it became fashionable, Back is concerned with people, animals and the environment and their interconnectedness. His whole life, he has used his art to deliver an urgent message, that of respecting and preserving nature. “I was very strongly affected and upset by industrialization, pollution and the massive destruction of our planet’s natural treasures, animals. I illustrated these themes in a way that was easy to understand and acceptable...”

This retrospective exhibition features two sketchbooks, fifty-four original drawings and nineteen original sequences of cels from the films *The Man Who Planted Trees* and *The Mighty River*. Many works are being exhibited for the first time.

Back was enthusiastic about the idea of an exhibition. He created a work especially for the exhibition, *L’horreur boréale* [The Boreal Horror], a large dreary, denuded landscape that bears witness to the dramatic consequences of uncontrolled deforestation. The goal of this work is to encourage people to denounce the abuse of logging companies around the world. It depicts the boreal forest as seen by Frédéric Back on a flight from Vancouver to Montreal in 1998.

This nightmarish vision has haunted him ever since. The artist incorporated an emblematic statement in his work:

From east to west and from north to south, millions of square kilometres of Canada's boreal forest have been clear cut! All that's left is a fringe of trees around lakes . . . as far as the eye can see the land is bare, marked by bulldozer tracks, burned by the sun, eroded by wind and ice . . .

The rapaciousness of our governments and industries, of forest engineers and people prepared to do anything! They have stripped away the land's protective coat, full of life, which tempered the climate and supplied the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River with nutritive water for centuries! This is a crime against life and against future generations!

“Destroyers of the forest are enemies of the public weal!”– Cicero (106 B.C.)

The Themes

The exhibition is organized around three major themes: “**The Engaged Artist**” reveals Back’s social engagement through the posters he created for organizations like the SOS Water coalition and the satirical drawings that deal with the mistreatment of animals or the effects of industrial pollution. “**Bearing Witness to Nature**” presents – for the first time – Back’s gouaches of Quebec landscapes (executed since 1948), an inexhaustible source of fascination for the artist, as well as ink drawings of Quebec animals and a book of sketches executed during a stay at Lac-à-la-Loutre in the Laurentians. Another sketchbook, from 1949, chronicles his trip to the Canadian West coast as far as the Queen Charlotte Islands. Several watercolours and an oil on canvas evoke vast forests of sequoias and cedars and the Haida culture; other works, in coloured pencil and pastel on acetate are original cels from the film *Memories of the Earth* (2002), which is one of the focal points in the section on the “**Filmmaker with a Message.**” The theme of water and the precariousness of the world’s fauna is examined through original sequenced cels – never before exhibited – from the film *The Mighty River* (1993). The demonstration is backed up by four illustrated plates from the essay “A Farewell to Whales” by biologist Pierre Béland, as well as some ink drawings and pastel sketches of Nova Scotia and the Gaspé, which served as references for the artist. The original sequenced cels of *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1987) illustrate the artist’s commitment to environmental causes. The presentation concludes with a montage of short excerpts from these three films and *Everything, Nothing* (1978).

Biographical Notes

Born in Saarbrücken on April 8, 1924, Back spent his childhood in Strasbourg and his summers on the farm, where he developed a deep love for animals. He studied in Paris at the École Estienne and then enrolled at the École des beaux-arts de Rennes, where he studied under Mathurin Méheut, a renowned painter and illustrator who would prove to be a major influence in Back’s life, both on the human level and artistically. He began his career as a painter and exhibited his works at the Salon de la Marine, Paris, in 1946 and 1947. In 1948, Back left for Canada and settled in Montreal, where he taught at the École du Meuble and the École des Beaux-arts de Montréal. In 1952, he was hired by the then-nascent Radio-Canada network as an illustrator and a creator of visual effects, scenery and models. Through his work in film animation, he found another way to present his convictions, a practice that he pursued in Radio-Canada’s animation studios from 1968 to 1993. Back has won innumerable awards, including two Oscars for his animated films *Crac!* and *The Man Who Planted Trees*.

He used his poetic and global approach to deal with environmental questions, sound the alarm and suggest ways we can change our behaviour and compensate for the disastrous effects of our thoughtlessness, as seen in his early films, *Illusion* (1975) and *Everything, Nothing* (1978), some scenes from *Crac!* (1981) and his iconic work *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1987), which was inspired by a short story by Jean Giono, and even *The Mighty River* (1993). Back said of his films, “Without being able to foresee their journey, I made them to motivate people to take the actions that our fragile planet so desperately needs.”

Back’s commitment to nature is equalled only by his passion for art. While expressing his message, he continues to develop his creative vision. He experiments and enriches his artistic vocabulary by developing personal techniques that have become his signature.

Richard Gagnier, Head of the Museum’s Conservation Department, is the curator of the exhibition.

The exhibition *Frédéric Back: One with Nature* has been made possible thanks to the support of the Cinémathèque québécoise, Société Radio-Canada, the Atelier Frédéric Back and the co-operation of the artist.

Admission to the exhibition is free at all times.

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INFORMATION

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Frédéric Back: One with Nature

June 18 – September 27, 2009

Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion

1379 Sherbrooke Street West – Level 2

Free admission

Images of works are available on the Museum’s Web site at mmfa.qc.ca/media

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MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE MONTRÉAL
THE MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

FRÉDÉRIC BACK, ONE WITH NATURE

LIST OF WORKS

If You Want Peace

1990

Photocopy of the original pencil drawing on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Forest under Snow

1949

Gouache and pencil on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Mount Royal, Montreal

1949

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Mountains, Huberdeau

1948

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Plain, Huberdeau

1949

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Lac des Pins

1949

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

The Man Who Planted Trees

1987

1. *Gionno*

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence on wove paper

2. *Landscape and Leaves in the Wind*

Coloured pencil and varnish on frosted acetates mounted in sequence, pastel and coloured pencil on wove paper

3. *Forest Cut during the War*

Coloured pencil on a frosted acetate superimposed on pastel on wove paper

4. *Hunters and Dogs*

Coloured pencil on superimposed frosted acetates on pastel on wove paper

5. *Child Drinking*

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence on wove paper

6. *Discovery of the Forest*

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence

7. *Shepherd Blowing on Bees*

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence on wove paper

8. *Field and Remains*

Coloured pencil on a frosted acetate superimposed on pastel on wove paper

Société Radio-Canada

On deposit, Cinémathèque québécoise

9. *Elzéard's Dog*

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence

10. *The Death of Elzéard's Wife and Daughter*

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

The Man Who Planted Trees

Elzéard Bouffier Planting Acorns

1987

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence and pastel on wove paper

Société Radio-Canada

The Man Who Planted Trees

Elzéard Climbing the Mountain

1987

Coloured pencil on a frosted acetate superimposed on pastel on wove paper

Société Radio-Canada

On deposit, Cinémathèque québécoise

Red River

1950

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Red River

1950

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Red River

1948

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Burned Forest, Huberdeau

1949

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Rocky Mountains and the Valley (Banff)

1949

Gouache and pencil on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Memories of the Earth

Forest, Rose Harbour, Queen Charlotte Islands

1999

Ink and watercolour on wove paper

Illustration for the film *Memories of the Earth*

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada/Max Films, 2002

Atelier Frédéric Back

Quebec Notebook 1948–1949, Otter Lake

1. Farm

Taken from the notebook bound by the artist

Gouache on wove paper

2. Black Bears

Taken from the notebook bound by the artist

Ink on wove paper

3. House in Winter and House under the Snow

In a notebook bound by the artist

India ink and gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Other Studies

4. *Caribou Study*

1950

Ink and watercolour on wove paper

5. *Elk Study*

1950

Ink on wove paper

6. *Moose Studies*

1949

Pencil on wove paper

7. *Wolf Studies*

1952

Ink on wove paper

8. *Moose Studies*

1950

Ink on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Memories of the Earth

1999

Illustrations for the film *Memories of the Earth*

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada/Max Films, 2002

Atelier Frédéric Back

1. *Canoe in the Tree (Haida Gwaii)*

Gouache, coloured pencil and varnish on superimposed frosted acetates, coloured pencil and pastel on wove paper

2. *Queen Charlotte Islands*

1999

Watercolour, ink and coloured pencil on wove paper

3. *Queen Charlotte Islands (Yakoun)*

Coloured pencil, pastel and varnish on a superimposed frosted acetate, coloured pencil and pastel on wove paper

4. *Totem Hidden in the Trees (Haida Gwaii)*

Coloured pencil on superimposed frosted acetates and pastel on wove paper

5. *Totem Poles*

Pastel on a frosted acetate superimposed on ink and watercolour on wove paper

Honeymoon Diary

Birch Forest

1949

Grease pencil on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

***L'horreur boréale* (“The Boreal Horror”)**

2009

Acrylic, coloured pencil, pastel and felt pen on plywood

Private collection

From east to west and from north to south, millions of square kilometres of Canada's boreal forest have been clear cut!

All that's left is a fringe of trees around lakes . . . as far as the eye can see the land is bare, marked by bulldozer tracks, burned by the sun, eroded by wind and ice . . .

The rapaciousness of our governments and industries, of forest engineers and people prepared to do anything! They have stripped away the land's protective coat, full of life, which tempered the climate and supplied the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River with nutritive water for centuries! This is a crime against life and against future generations!

“Destroyers of the forest are enemies of the public weal!” Cicero (106 B.C.)

Memories of the Earth

Devastated Forest (near Charlotte City)

1999

Watercolour, ink and pastel on wove paper

Illustration for the film *Memories of the Earth*

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada/Max Films, 2002

Atelier Frédéric Back

Memories of the Earth

Totem Poles, Queen Charlotte Islands

1999

Coloured pencil on a frosted acetate superimposed on pastel on wove paper

Illustration for the film *Memories of the Earth*

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada/Max Films, 2002

Atelier Frédéric Back

Kitwancool (Haida Village)

1950

Oil on canvas

Süzel Back-Drapeau collection

Glacier, Rocky Mountains

1949

Gouache on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Village of Percé

1950

Grease paint and gouache on newsprint

Atelier Frédéric Back

Cod Fishers

1950

Grease paint on newsprint

Atelier Frédéric Back

Three Fathom Causeway, Nova Scotia

1959

Ink on cardboard

Private collection

Plates for *Beluga: A Farewell to Whales*

Pierre Béland (New York: Lyons and Burford, 1996)

1. Plate 2

Coloured pencil on wove paper

Loto-Québec collection

2. Plate 3

Coloured pencil on frosted acetate

3. Plate 7

Coloured pencil on frosted acetate

4. Plate 9

Coloured pencil on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

The Mighty River

1993

1. *Penguins*

Coloured pencil and pastel on frosted acetates mounted in sequence

2. *Belugas*

Coloured pencil and varnish on frosted acetates mounted in sequence

3. *Harpooning a Polar Bear*

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence on wove paper

4. *Sturgeon Fishing*

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence, pastel on wove paper

Société Radio-Canada

On deposit, Cinémathèque québécoise

5. *Leathery Turtle*

Coloured pencil and varnish on frosted acetates mounted in sequence, pastel on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

All Nothing

A Human Transformation

1978

Coloured pencil on frosted acetates mounted in sequence

Société Radio-Canada

On deposit, Cinémathèque québécoise

The Mighty River

The Sculpting River

1993

Coloured pencil on superimposed frosted acetates, pastel and spray paint on wove paper

Société Radio-Canada

On deposit, Cinémathèque québécoise

The Mighty River

The Reconciliation

1993

Coloured pencil and pastel on superimposed frosted acetates on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

The Mighty River

Niagara Falls, the Stock Exchange, Pollution in the Great Lakes

1993

Assemblage, coloured pencil and varnish on superimposed frosted acetates, pastel and coloured pencil on wove paper

Société Radio-Canada

The Mighty River

Cartier's Landing, Native Peoples, Belugas

1993

Assemblage and coloured pencil on superimposed frosted acetates, pastel and coloured pencil on wove paper

Société Radio-Canada

1. *Day of the Biosphere*

1971

Photocopy of the original pencil and coloured pencil drawing on wove paper

2. *The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg*

1970

Felt pen on tracing paper

3. James Bay

1970

Silkscreen on wove paper

Made for the Société pour vaincre la pollution (SVP)

4. Auto-destruction (“Self-Destruction”)

1970

Photocopy of the original coloured pencil drawing on wove paper

Made for the Société pour vaincre la pollution (SVP)

5. Marine Life

1980-1994

Assemblage, coloured pencil and pastel on frosted acetates, photocopies on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

“You are the criminals responsible for overfishing.”

“Great numbers of auks inhabited the island of the north Atlantic coastline. Audubon was one of the last people to see them alive in the St. Lawrence estuary.

Pinnipeds of the St. Lawrence river”

“A fleet of near 50 whalingships was active in the estuary of the St. Lawrence river until the international moratory agreement of 1982.”

“More than 100,000 walrus lived on the beaches and shores of the St. Lawrence river until the 18th century.

The Mighty River”

6. There is no Country without Country-dwellers

2004

Inkjet print on wove paper

Made for the Union paysanne

Atelier Frédéric Back

7. Animals Prohibited

1970

Photocopy of the original coloured pencil drawing on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

8. The Extinction of the Animals

1980

Photocopy of the original coloured pencil drawing on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

9. *In the Dock*

1980

Photocopy of the original coloured pencil drawing on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Feast and Famine

2007

Dry pastel on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

To Be or Not to Be

2006

Dry pastel on wove paper mounted on cardboard

Atelier Frédéric Back

“Is this life? Pregnant sows in cages, imagine the noise, the smell, the suffering . . . Shame on the humanity that tolerates and justifies techniques like this!”

Parable of the Blind

2006

Coloured pencil on a frosted acetate and pastel on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Blue Kyoto

2005

Dry pastel on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

Red Kyoto

2005

Dry pastel on wove paper

Atelier Frédéric Back

The Birth of Venus

1970

Coloured pencil and watercolour on wove paper

Poster made for the Société pour vaincre la pollution (SVP)

Atelier Frédéric Back

St. Lawrence, Pray for Yourself

1996

Offset on wove paper

Poster made for S.O.S. Water!

Atelier Frédéric Back

Amnesty International belongs to no one because freedom of opinion belongs to everyone

1980

Offset on wove paper

Poster made for Amnesty International

Atelier Frédéric Back

CRAC!

Nuclear Power Plant and Art Museum

1981

Assemblage and coloured pencil on superimposed frosted acetates, pastel and spray paint on wove paper

Société Radio-Canada

Films

All Nothing

Production : Radio-Canada, 1978

The Mighty River

Production : Radio-Canada, 1978

The Man Who Planted Trees,

Production : Radio-Canada, 1987

Crac!

Production : Radio-Canada, 1987

Memories of the Earth

Production: The National Film Board of Canada/Max Films, 2002



MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE MONTRÉAL
THE MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

L'horreur boréale

(*"The Boreal Horror"*)

2009

Acrylic, coloured pencil, pastel and felt pen on plywood

Private collection

"From east to west and from north to south, millions of square kilometres of Canada's boreal forest have been clear cut!

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"Destroyers of the forest are enemies of the public weal!"— Cicero (106 B.C.)

The goal of this work, which was created specially for the present exhibition, is to encourage people to denounce the abuse of logging companies around the world. It depicts the boreal forest as seen by Frédéric Back on a flight from Vancouver to Montreal in 1998. This nightmarish vision has haunted him ever since.

Today, it is possible to act!

Simply sign up to *La Société de l'homme qui plantait des arbres* on Facebook.