



INCIPIT COVID-19

Photographs by
Michel Huneault



Press
release

INCIPIT – COVID-19

Exhibition of Photographs by Michel Huneault: A Look Back at the First Months of the Pandemic in Montreal

Montreal, September 14, 2022. – From September 16, 2022, to January 22, 2023, the McCord Stewart Museum will present *INCIPIT – COVID-19*, an exhibition of photographs by Michel Huneault. Through 30 works and 3 projections of photos and videos comprising over 150 images, the exhibition presents the daily reality of the first months of the pandemic as experienced by Montrealers, healthcare workers and patients suffering from the virus. *INCIPIT – COVID-19* is a chance for the public to reflect back on the series of events that put the world on pause, starting from the first outbreak.

In the spring of 2020, as Montreal was being hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Quebec government ordered a general lockdown and the closure of businesses and schools in order to reduce the spread of the virus. Struck by the historic nature of the situation, the McCord Stewart Museum gave photographer Michel Huneault carte blanche to document this unprecedented upheaval. From April to August, he attempted to comprehend and capture images of the scourge that was spreading across the planet and continues to affect daily life to this day.

Using a singular approach that combines several research-creation strategies, the artist photographed the city in the grip of extraordinary public health measures. In addition, he gathered personal statements from a number of individuals. Finally, exceptional access to three healthcare institutions enabled him to directly document the work of healthcare workers and the impact of the virus on patients and their families.

What's on your mind?

From the very first days of the pandemic, he wondered how he was going to understand and capture such an unusual, hard to see phenomenon whose key stages were impossible to predict and which affected individuals as well as communities. Conscious of the fact that our individual isolation experiences were leading us—himself included—to develop tunnel vision, he began a chain of portraits throughout the city. He wanted to get out, make contact with others, find out what was on their minds, and use these borrowed words to help describe his

own thoughts. Every person he met with then recommended someone else, and so on. This process allowed him to take portraits of about thirty individuals and collect their handwritten thoughts. It helped him understand how peoples' states of mind evolved in the first months of the pandemic.

Seeing and being seen

In order to understand our new reality, it was imperative to be able to represent COVID-19 in the most direct way: in healthcare settings. Michel Huneault was eventually granted access to Notre-Dame Hospital, Verdun Hospital and the Maimonides Geriatric Centre, where he spent 20 non-consecutive days from May 8 to June 22, 2020, establishing a relationship of mutual trust with their respective teams.

The photographer strongly believes that, for the population as a whole, having access to these images and these places is essential to clearly understanding the context of our sacrifices, rounding out our personal experiences, and continuing our efforts to comprehend what happened and what is still happening.

Among the thousands of photographs taken by Michel Huneault, those selected for the exhibition illustrate a variety of experiences occurring simultaneously in the public sphere, private life and healthcare settings. Together, they chronicle the complexity of this critical period by echoing myriad individual lived experiences.

“I pictured these three research areas—private space, public space and healthcare space—to try to understand the confusion of COVID more clearly, and to chart a methodical path through this intimidating task. Gradually, I realized that this project's particular contribution would be in the interplay between these three visually isolated realities—some of them invisible to many—from a perspective that's descriptive but also artistic, personal, collective.

“Beyond the urgency and the pervading tension, I think a strong sense of solidarity emerges when you see these photographs grouped together in a single space, a single moment. Our respective efforts take on meaning, our experiences gain closure,” explains Michel Huneault.

“In April 2020, when we entrusted Michel Huneault with the mission of documenting the COVID-19 pandemic, we were already aware of the historic weight of this event. However, we had no idea at the time that more than two years later, the pandemic would still be far from over. We are very pleased to finally be able to publicly unveil this exhibition, which provides a fresh look at everyone's collective efforts to live with the sanitary restrictions and to mitigate their impact on our lives. Moreover, thanks to the exclusive access Michel Huneault gained to healthcare facilities, the exhibition provides a compelling look at the pandemic's impact on that milieu, on the work of healthcare workers, and on patients.

“The McCord Stewart Museum's mission is to document the social history of Montreal. Michel Huneault's sensitive but never sensationalist photographs offer a striking and extremely touching perspective on this period that will remain an important chapter in Montreal's history. The Museum is very proud to add the 30 works hanging in this gallery to our collection, where they will continue to bear witness to history in the making,” said Suzanne Sauvage, CEO of the McCord Stewart Museum.



Michel Huneault, *Freda leaves the isolation floor after recovering from COVID-19, Maimonides, Geriatric Center, Montreal, June 22, 2020, M2022.13.26, McCord Stewart Museum*



Michel Huneault, *Waiting line, Costco Anjou, Montreal, April 10, 2020, M2022.13.14, McCord Stewart Museum*

Biography of Michel Huneault

Michel Huneault is a documentary photographer and visual artist. Committed to a personal, humanist approach, he brings together still images and immersive elements in his work. He is interested in collective trauma, migration and other geographically complex realities such as the consequences of climate change.

Michel Huneault has a master's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, where, as a Rotary Peace Fellow, he studied the role of collective memory after major traumatic events. He studied under and assisted Magnum photographer Gilles Peress at Berkeley and in New York City. Before devoting himself to photography full-time in 2008, he worked in international development for over a decade, a career that took him to over 20 countries, including Afghanistan, where he spent an entire year in Kandahar.

His project documenting the Lac-Mégantic train disaster won the 2015 Dorothea Lange-Paul Taylor Prize in the United States. In 2016, his project Post Tohoku about the aftermath of the tsunami in Japan was nominated for the seventh Prix Pictet award and received an Antoine-Desilets award in Quebec. In 2018, his series Roxham was transformed into a virtual reality project by the National Film Board of Canada. He develops his projects in different chapters, presenting them on complementary platforms ranging from traditional media to contemporary art spaces.

Credit

An exhibition organized by the McCord Stewart Museum.

Curator: H  l  ne Samson, outgoing Curator, Photography, McCord Stewart Museum

Project manager: Caroline Truchon, McCord Stewart Museum

Exhibition designer: Pierre-  tienne Locas

Graphic designer: David Martin

Michel Huneault would like to thank the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Qu  bec and the Canada Council for the Arts for supporting this project.



Michel Huneault,
Temporary annex, Verdun Hospital,
Montreal, May 29, 2020,
M2022.13.23, McCord Stewart Museum

Activity related to the exhibition

Documented in real time – Round table

Wednesday, September 21, 6 to 7 p.m. – At the Museum

For the exhibition *INCIPIT – COVID-19*, the Museum is organizing a round table discussion around Michel Huneault's photography project, which provides an early record of this historic moment by capturing the beginnings of the COVID-19 crisis. The event will examine the necessity of archiving the present and explore the roles of different stakeholders—artists, journalists, institutions, civil society—in creating a network that engages in the values of accessibility and visibility.

Speakers:

- Michel Huneault, photographer
- Zoë Tousignant, curator, Photography, McCord Stewart Museum
- Pierre-Paul Milette, administrator who has worked in management positions within Quebec's health and social services network

The discussion will be moderated by Vincent Lavoie, professor in the Art History Department at UQAM.

Free activity, in French. Space is limited, reservation required on the [Museum website](#).

Framing Everyday Life: Stories of Confinement

Alongside the photographic mission entrusted to Michel Huneault, in April 2020 the Museum launched a collaborative public project, [Framing Everyday Life: Stories of Confinement](#). This project invited the public to express, through photography, how the pandemic and confinement influenced their relationship with the outside world and each other. After more than 2 years, over 4,000 photographs with the hashtags #FramingEverydayLife and #Cadrerlequotidien have been shared on social media. The project's success provides a portrait of the diverse realities experienced by Quebecers and the way they evolved. The tagged images can be viewed on the project's webpage on the McCord Stewart Museum's website.



Michel Huneault,
Temporary COVID-19 intensive care unit,
Notre-Dame Hospital, Montreal, May 26, 2020.
M2022.13.11, McCord Stewart Museum

The Museum's opening hours and admission fees

Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. | Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Holiday hours:

Thanksgiving Monday, October 10: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Christmas Sunday, December 25: Closed
Boxing Day Monday, December 26: noon to 6 p.m.
New Year's Day Sunday, January 1: Closed
The day after New Year's Monday, January 2: noon to 6 p.m.

Admissions fees until December 31, 2022

Adult: \$19 | Seniors: \$17 | Student (18 to 30): \$14 | 17 and under: free | Indigenous persons: free

Admissions fees from January 1, 2023

Adult: \$19 | Senior: \$17 | Student (13 to 30): \$14 | 12 and under: free | Indigenous persons: free

Wednesday evenings: free (3rd floor exhibition and permanent exhibition)
or \$9.50 (2nd floor exhibitions).

First Sunday of the month: free for Quebec residents.

To create the best possible experience for everyone, it is necessary to reserve tickets online for the Museum, whether paid or not. Go to the [Admissions page](#) on the Museum's website.

The McCord Stewart Museum would like to thank BMO Financial Group for the free Wednesday evenings, the Fondation J.A. DeSève for providing free admission for children 12 and under, and the Rossy Foundation for providing free admission to teens aged 13 to 17 for the year 2022.

Covid-19: measures for a safe visit

The Museum respects the health measures recommended by the public health authorities.
To see the measures in effect during your visit, go to the [Museum's website](#).

McCord Stewart Museum: museum of photography

The McCord Stewart Museum's [photography collection](#) encompasses over 2.15 million photographs that primarily document the social history of Montreal, but also that of Quebec and Canada. Ranging from a series of daguerreotypes created in the 1840s-1850s to contemporary digital images, the collection illustrates the development of the art of photography along with the great transformations that have marked the city over the last two centuries. The Notman Photographic Archives constitute the core of the collection with some 450,000 photographs from the Montreal studio founded by William Notman (1826-1891) in 1856 and run by his sons until 1935 under the name Wm. Notman & Son. In the fall of 2019, the Notman archives were listed in the prestigious Canada Memory of the World Register of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

About the McCord Stewart Museum

The McCord Stewart Museum celebrates life in Montreal, its people and communities, past and present. Reaching beyond the city to the wider world, the Museum creates and presents engaging exhibitions, educational programming and cultural activities with a critical and inclusive take on social history. Its collections of Archives, Documentary Art, Dress, Fashion and Textiles, Indigenous Cultures, Material Culture and Photography comprise 200, 000 objects and works of art, 2.15 million photographs, 3,500 rare books and 340 linear metres of textual archives. The McCord Stewart Museum: Our People, Our Stories.

– 30 –

MEDIA KIT AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Source: McCord Stewart Museum

Information and interview requests:

Marc-André Champagne
Officer, Public Relations
Musée McCord Stewart
514-861-6701, ext. 1239
marc-andre.champagne@mccord-stewart.ca

