



Cedric Pearson, *The Exhibition and Photographic Picnic at the Collective's Farmhouse, Disraeli*, July 23, 1972. © Cedric Pearson

Press release

Disraeli Revisited – Chronicle of an Event in Quebec Photography

A Look Back on the 50th Anniversary of a Pivotal Chapter in Quebec Photographic History

Montreal, October 27, 2022 – From October 28, 2022, to February 19, 2023, the McCord Stewart Museum presents *Disraeli Revisited – Chronicle of an Event in Quebec Photography*, marking the 50th anniversary of this major event in the history of photography in Quebec. Through 144 photographs, including over 67 that have never been exhibited before, 44 archival documents and a video, the public is invited to discover the Disraeli project, the topic of heated debate in the 1970s that sparked a deep reflection on the ethics of photographic representation and image rights. Through this exhibition, the Museum intends at once to celebrate, expand and revisit the original body of work by bringing together images and objects that tell the story from multiple points of view. The exhibition is presented by *La Presse*.

The Disraeli project

In the summer of 1972, four young photographers spent three months in Disraeli. Claire Beaugrand-Champagne, Michel Campeau, Roger Charbonneau and Cedric Pearson, along with researchers Ginette Laurin and Maryse Pellerin, set out to produce a collective documentary portrait of Disraeli and its residents' everyday reality. The group, officially known as the "*Collectif de l'Imagerie Populaire de Disraeli*," lived in a farmhouse on the outskirts of town. Throughout their stay, they photographed and interviewed locals and developed certain friendships. This closeness made it possible for the photographers to take portraits of their subjects in action or posing nonchalantly in the places where they lived and worked.

The controversy

In the months and years that followed the group's stay in Disraeli, the photographs were widely distributed in publications and exhibitions. In 1974, controversy broke out when the popular French-language magazine *Perspectives* published an article and a selection of 18 images. This magazine – inserted in *La Presse*, *La Tribune*, *Le Soleil*, *Le Droit* and other French-language newspapers – was distributed in more than 550,000 copies.

Influential people from the Disraeli community soon expressed their disapproval in local papers, stating that the photographs unfairly and negatively represented the town. Some Montreal journalists, including famous writer Pierre Vallières in *Le Devoir*, came to the group's defence. This article triggered a strong reaction from prominent residents of Disraeli, creating a real media storm. While this debate brought the Montreal photography community to reflect on the social impact of documentary photography, it also raised such broad questions as the manipulation of information by the media, the idealization of rural life by the younger generation, and the subjectivity of photography as an art form.

Previously unpublished photographs and audio recordings

In collaboration with the photographers, exhibition curator Zoë Tousignant, Photography Curator at the McCord Stewart Museum, revisited an imposing body of images and chose to present over sixty previously unpublished photographs, with the goal of giving the public a new perspective on the project.

“The aim in selecting images in which we see the members of the collective directly interacting with the people of Disraeli was to show another side of the picture, or to see how the interpretation of this body of work might change if we're presented with evidence of a real relationship between photographer and photographed. These images also remind us that the photographers and researchers who created the Disraeli project were very young. They were all just starting out on their respective career paths,” said Zoë Tousignant.

A series of audio recordings produced by the group's researchers, Ginette Laurin and Maryse Pellerin, which were thought to have been lost, were recovered while putting together the exhibition. On top of providing a glimpse into the soundscape that surrounded the photography sessions, these recordings are exceptional documents on the history of a period and a place. A 16-minute video presented in the exhibition, produced by the Museum's team, combines audio clips and a selection of the photographers' contact sheets, creating an amplified experience of some of the better-known images.

50 years after Disraeli: a critical reassessment

Still studied in college and university art history and photography courses today, the Disraeli images are canonical in the history of Quebec photography. This project is now discussed not only for its intrinsic value, but also to spark reflection on the ethics of photographic representation. The aim is not to resolve the controversy, but to continue examining the issues that photography can raise and what photographs mean for those who take them as well as those represented in them. For Zoë Tousignant, telling the story of this body of work today is also a chance to reflect on the impact of the circulation of photographic images:

“For me, it was clear from the start that the aftermath of the Disraeli project – including the media storm that erupted in the press – needed to be part of the exhibition. Although it was upsetting for the members of the collective at the time, the way the project was discussed in the press has become an intrinsic part of the stories that these images tell. Photographs accrue meaning every time they are published and seen in a new context, and that meaning needs to be reflected in the history that we write.”

“Fifty years later, reflections on representation and image rights triggered by the debate that followed the mass circulation of the Disraeli images are still topical. As a Montreal social history museum and a photography museum, we are aware of the social impact of photography. We have been careful to consider this dimension in our actions and artistic choices at the Museum. Disraeli Revisited is an excellent opportunity to reiterate our commitment to amplifying the voices and perspectives of people affected by our exhibition projects,” said Suzanne Sauvage, President and CEO of the McCord Stewart Museum.



Cedric Pearson
Store in Town, Disraeli, 1972.
© Cedric Pearson



Claire Beaugrand-Champagne
Henri Gosselin With His Cows, Disraeli, 1972.
© Claire Beaugrand-Champagne

Photo contest in Disraeli

Until February 3, 2023, the McCord Stewart Museum invites residents of Disraeli to add their voices to the exhibition by submitting photographs representing their vision of the municipality and the community of Disraeli today. The photo contest is a chance for the Disraeli community to present the evolution of the town 50 years later, as well as their vision of what characterizes it. All the photos submitted are presented in the exhibition, giving the public a current perspective on life and community in Disraeli.

Credits

An exhibition created by the McCord Stewart Museum.

Curator: Zoë Tousignant, Curator, Photography, McCord Stewart Museum

Project manager: François Vallée, McCord Stewart Museum

Exhibition design and graphic design: Principal



Roger Charbonneau, *Matteau Children, Disraeli*, 1972. © Roger Charbonneau

Activities related to the exhibition

Reviewing Disraeli – Symposium

Friday, November 4, 1 to 4 p.m. – At the Museum and online

The Museum is hosting an afternoon of talks that brings together several individuals who have reflected on the historical impact of the Disraeli project. The talks will investigate the different issues raised by this photographic event, namely the development of documentary photography as an art form, the project's public dissemination and reception, the personal and political motivations of the participants, the group's methodological approach, and the broad cultural significance of the Disraeli images.

Speakers:

- Pierre Dessureault, curator and Canadian photography expert
- Mona Hakim, art historian, critic, author and curator
- Alexis Desgagnés, researcher and author
- Maryse Pellerin, Disraeli project researcher, teacher and author
- Zoë Tousignant, Curator, Photography, McCord Stewart Museum

Free activity, in French followed by a bilingual discussion period.
Space is limited, reservation required on the Museum's [website](#).

Conversation With the Four Photographers of the Disraeli Project Wednesday, January 18, 6 to 7:30 p.m. – At the Museum

This discussion will be a chance for the public to meet the photographers and learn more about the Disraeli project, as well as the images and archival documents presented in the exhibition *Disraeli Revisited – Chronicle of an Event in Quebec Photography*.

Discussion moderated by Zoë Tousignant, exhibition curator and Curator of Photography

Free activity, in French, followed by a bilingual Q&A period.
Space is limited, reservation required on the Museum's [website](#).



Roger Charbonneau
Exhibition at City Hall, Disraeli, 24 June 1972.
© Roger Charbonneau

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:

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 including *Disraeli Revisited*).

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](#).



Claire Beaugrand-Champagne
Ti-Noir Lajeunesse, The Blind Violinist, Disraeli, 1972.
© Claire Beaugrand-Champagne

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.

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Media kit and photographs

Source: McCord Stewart Museum

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