

montreal: a people's present.

abc poster series

al blair

These posters were presented during the Art in Action exhibition as part of Study in Action 2012, Montreal. To view the series online, go to <http://www.abcposters.wordpress.com>

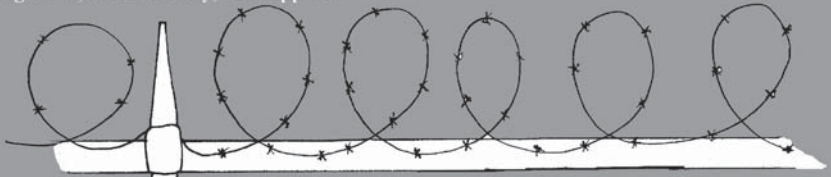
Inspired by Justseeds' fantastic People's History posters, this poster series pays tribute to Montreal's present.

Feeling ill-equipped as a relative newcomer to Montreal from small-town Quebec, without sufficient time to research adequately, I found it difficult to represent moments of Montreal's past or history in ink. However, depicting aspects of its present, many of which I have become personally interested and invested in seems more of a tangible task.

These posters are anchored in the present moment- often referring to events that occurred within the past three years. They are contemporary illustrations of struggles that are rooted in Montreal's past, and will soon become part of Montreal's people's history.

Youth Incarceration

Canada incarcerates more convicted youth than almost any similarly industrialized country. 'Tough-on-crime' legislation will only continue to expand the crimes for which youth can be incarcerated and the amount of time they can spend in custody - resulting in more kids aged 12 to 17 ending up in lock down. However, studies show time and time again that incarceration reduces young people's likelihood of getting a job once they get out, and increases their likelihood of recidivism. The answer is not to build more prisons, but to focus on education, (re) integration, accountability, and support.



Montreal houses many youth detention centres - especially in the West Island and on the North Shore. Many of these facilities are lock-down units where youth are under 24/7 supervision. They are prisons.



For more observations on youth incarceration in Montreal and beyond, refer to Montreal-based writer and social justice organizer Robyn Meranda's article "Incarcerating Youth as Justice?" <http://robymeranda.wordpress.com/about/117-2/>

Gentrification Past

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, as modernistic urban planning strategies, the Quiet Revolution, and international events such as Global Expositions were sweeping across Quebec, Montreal city planners and politicians were set on transforming Ville-Marie into a clean, modern, efficient, and slum-free city.

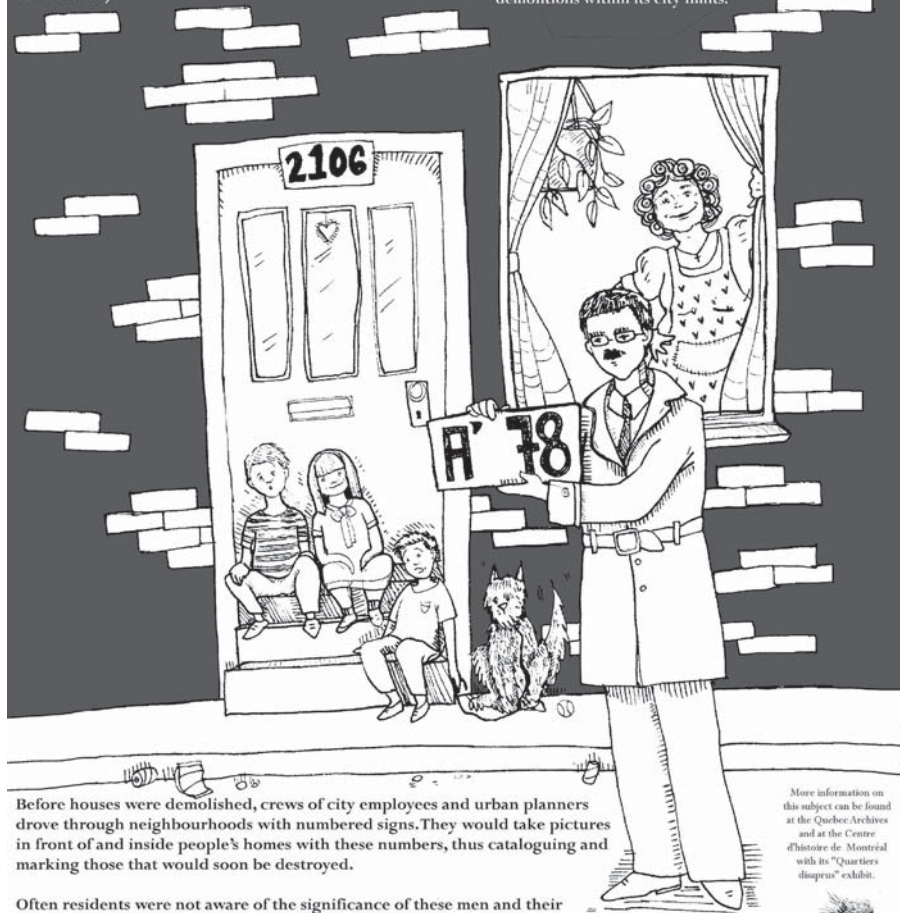
Mayor Jean Drapeau's ideal was to expulse [poor] residents from the city core, and replace entire working-class neighbourhoods with the modernized architecture of public institutions and private-sectors commerce buildings—all in the name of Progress.

Residents were evicted and homes were demolished in three down-town neighbourhoods: Goose Village (formerly just east of Pointe St-Charles by the port), Faubourg à M'lasse (where now stands the CBC building and its parking lot), and the Red Light (once stretched between St-Denis and Bleury, south of Sherbrooke).

Goose Village, Faubourg à M'lasse, and the Red Light were some of the poorest neighbourhoods in Montreal. They were often referred to as slums. Their removal allowed for the construction of the Ville-Marie Expressway, the widening of Boulevard René-Lesvesque, the building of the CBC tower, and the establishment of the Expo '67 complex. Evictions, demolitions, and increased police presence were justified in the name of urban progress.

Between 1954 and 1974, over 28,000 homes were destroyed. During this time, the factories and businesses within these three neighbourhoods were also being evicted. People lost their jobs, their homes, and their communities.

During this period, Westmount saw no evictions or demolitions within its city limits.



Before houses were demolished, crews of city employees and urban planners drove through neighbourhoods with numbered signs. They would take pictures in front of and inside people's homes with these numbers, thus cataloguing and marking those that would soon be destroyed.

Often residents were not aware of the significance of these men and their numbers—they smiled, thinking it was just a picture. The numbers foreshadowed a violent, selective, class-biased erasure.

More information on this subject can be found at the Quebec Archives and at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal with its "Quartiers disparus" exhibit.

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Gentrification Present

Today in 2012, gentrification and urban renewal continues. Condominiums and chic businesses are popping up in neighbourhoods where real-estate values and land-values are low.

Neighbourhoods with strong historical backgrounds in class and race struggles, and tight-knit communities of families and businesses that have been around for generations are being transformed, displaced, and erased.

Parc-Extension, Little Burgundy, Griffintown, St-Henri, Pointe-St-Charles, and Shaughnessy Village are all examples of such neighbourhoods.

As cafés, restaurants, art galleries, and condos are built and property values increase, the price of living in these neighbourhoods sky-rocket to a point where many residents can no longer afford to live in the spaces they have called their homes for generations.

This class-based erasure may not be as dramatic as the demolition of Goose Village, Faubourg à M'lasse, and the Red-Light. However, they are just as violent, traumatic, and unacceptable.



At the heart of Shaughnessy Village, on St-Catherine West, the Seville Theatre was a single-screen, 1148 seat theatre, and one of only 15 atmospheric theatres ever built in Canada.

Though many historians and community members advocated for its protection as a heritage site, the Seville fell into disrepair and was demolished in 2010 to make way for a 450-unit condo and commercial project.

The demolition of the Seville, just like the proposed demolition of homes near the Turcot Interchange, echoes the histories of destruction of Goose Village, Faubourg à M'lasse, and the Red Light.

Sign Language in Montreal

Two rarely-mentioned languages practiced in Montreal are American Sign Language and Quebec Sign Language (Langue des signes québécoise). ASL and LSQ are distinct languages, like English and French. They have their own grammar and vocabulary.

There are all sorts of reasons why someone might want to learn sign language. Someone might learn ASL/LSQ because they are deaf or because they have deaf loved ones, friends or family members. Others might learn to sign out of personal interest, or to become an interpreter.

Advocates for Quebec's deaf Anglophone community say there is a huge gap in visual interpreting services in the province – and more professionals need to be trained.

Not all people who have hearing impairments can read lips or mouth words, and having to write down everything to communicate can be quite tiring and bothersome (or in some cases, impossible) – this is why interpreters are useful. They can interpret for people when they visit the doctor's, when they attend class, or go to a job interview.

Many folks who are learning sign language come together to practice outside of school or home contexts. These free-forming, community-based meetings can take place in cafes or food courts.

ASL classes are offered in Montreal at the Mackay Center in NDG and at John Abbott College - among other places.



Police Killings in Montreal

In January 6th 2012, Farshad Mohammadi was shot and killed by police officers of the SPVM in Bonaventure metro station.

Weeks later, another man shot and killed by montreal police.

The list of victims of police brutality in Montreal is endless. Since 1987, it is believed that over 80 people have died at the hands of the Montreal police, including while in police custody.

In most cases, justice is no where to be found.

Incidents involving the serious injury or death of a civilian at the hands of police are generally investigated by another police force.

This method of investigation is biased towards police solidarity. Criminal charges have been laid against officers only three times since 1999, with at least two of the trials resulting in acquittals.

In late 2011, the Quebec Public Security Minister introduced Bill 46, which would allow for civilian oversight of investigations. However, Bill 46 does not ensure that the reports of investigations be necessarily made public. This is a serious flaw.



In memory of

Serge Laforest
 Edmund Lamontagne
 Jean-Hugues Fournier
 Yan Lafreniere
 René Laporte
 Bernard Armand
 Fernand Roux Jacques Lavoie
 Adrien Girard
 Vinkaitwar Bikhari
 Paul Grossette
 Serge Turgeon
 Kenneth Carter
 Mark White Anthony Griffin
 Bernard Laforest
 José Carlos Garcia
 Denis Paquette
 Yvon Lafrance
 Normand Major
 Paul McKinnon
 Leslie Presley
 Jorge Chavarria-Reyes
 Michel Saint-Georges
 Fabien Quiénty
 Michel Paradis
 Yvan Dugas
 Fritgerald Forbes
 Marcellus François
 Armand Fernandez
 Osmond Seymour Fletcher
 Trevor Kelly
 Yvon Asselin
 Richard Barnabé
 Paolo Romanelli
 Martin Suazo

Philippe Ferraro
 Nelson Perreault
 Daniel Bélair
 Michel Mathurin
 Richard Whaley
 Yvan Fond-Rouge
 Michel Charette
 Jean-Emmanuel Beaudet
 Jean-Pierre Lizotte
 Carl Ouellet
 Luc Aubert
 Sébastien McNicoll
 Michel Kibbe
 Michel Morin
 Michel Berniquez
 Rohan Wilson
 Omar Albert Thompson
 Troy Fesam Hakim
 Donald Greer
 Gloria Zimmerman
 Melissa Murat
 Stéphane Coulombe
 Benoît Richer
 Mohamed Anas Bennis
 Daniel Vanier
 Vianney Charest
 Guilem Registre
 Fredy Villanueva
 Jean-Claude Lemay
 Marcel Locas
 Patrick Saulnier
 Mario Hamel
 Patrick Limoges
 Farshad Mohammadi

For a thoughtful analysis of police brutality in Montreal, consult Samir Shaheen-Hussain, Robyn Maynard, and Anne-Marie Gallant's article at Montreal.MediaCoop.ca: "The Police Killing of Farshad Mohammadi: Exposing the Root Causes" (January 21, 2011).



The Criminalization of Sex Work in Montreal

Prostitution is not, and never has been, illegal in Canada but the majority of activities that surround it are. Here are some of the laws in the Canadian Criminal Code that criminalize sex work:

ARTICLE 210: The act of operating or being found in a "bawdy house" (a place maintained, occupied by, or visited by one or more persons with the objective of prostitution or of committing indecent acts). This forbids sex workers from working in their home or in a safe apartment rented for the purposes of sex work.

ARTICLE 211: The act of taking, or of transporting, someone to a "bawdy house." This section limits access to any accompanied service. A taxi driver or a friend, for example, could be charged.

ARTICLE 212: The act of influencing a person to practice prostitution or of living completely, or partially, from the revenues of prostitution. This forbids any friend or partner from benefiting from money coming from prostitution (i.e. to pay rent or support kids).

ARTICLE 213: The act of communicating with another person, in a public place, with the objective of practicing prostitution (e.g. This makes it difficult to check out a client before entering their car.)

These laws contribute to making the spaces and conditions of sex work dangerous and discriminatory.

On a positive note: in September 2010, the Ontario Superior Court struck down these laws, claiming that they are endangering the lives of sex workers. An appeal was made by the Conservative government, and now all are waiting for the Ontario Court of Appeal to make its ruling sometime in 2012.

There is hope that, if successful, the campaign to strike down these laws on a national level would significantly improve the working conditions of sex workers across Canada.

Until then, violence against sex workers is a reality that plays out on a daily basis. Each day sex workers are criminalized, incarcerated and denied the right to protection from violence. The violence of this repression is lived disproportionately by women working and living on the street, especially racialized women, transsexual women and other trans people.



During the week of December 17th sex workers and their allies stage actions and vigils to raise awareness about violence that is commonly committed against sex workers. In Montreal, Stella organizes its Red Umbrella march.

Stella is a community group created and run by sex workers and ex-sex workers. Visit www.chezstella.org



Growing Food in Montreal

Owning or having access to any size of land in a city such as Montreal is a huge privilege. Every inch of the city falls under zoning regulation, and almost every parcel of land is developed and privately owned. Once stolen from indigenous hands, Montreal's land base is still relatively inaccessible to those who wish to cultivate resources directly from its soil.

However, despite barriers and legal restrictions, people all over the city have transformed back yards, sidewalks, streets, underpasses, roofs, balconies, school yards, and parking lots into living, bountiful gardens.

Be they municipally, collectively, or individually run, these gardens feed thousands of hungry bellies every growing season. If you have the time, resources, and ability to sew, weed, and water, then growing your own food in the city is much cheaper than buying it at the grocery store. Gardening is also a social process where skill-exchanges are common and friendly chit-chat is the norm.

In the past few years, the City of Montreal has closed down many of its community gardens due to fears of soil contamination.

These measures have been met with opposition from scientists and community members who know that closing down gardens is not the only solution.

Raised beds, for instance, would avoid plants' contact with contaminated soil, and awareness campaigns about the washing of leafy vegetables would make a world of difference.

Fear of soil contamination will not stop Montreal's urban gardeners - nor will the city's bylaws.

Every year, communities continue their struggle for access to land. Recently, there has even been an increase in pressure placed on municipal officials to reconsider bylaws regarding the banning of chickens and honey bees within city limits.

The world of urban gardenign in Montreal is still filled with exciting potential!

