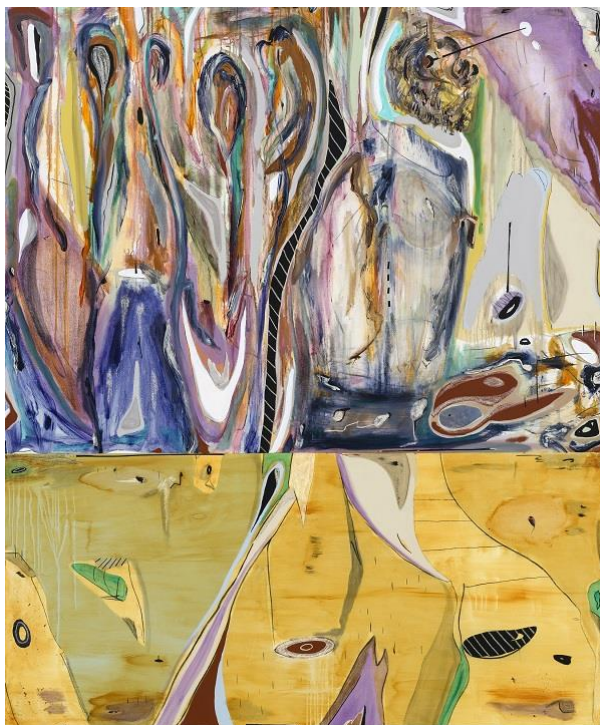


**MANUEL MATHIEU: SURVIVANCE**  
**Paintings of powerful, haunting, irrepressible beauty**

September 17, 2020 – March 28, 2021  
Contemporary Art Square  
Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion – Level S2



Manuel Mathieu (born in 1986), *The Gardener/Mané*, 2019.  
Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, gift of the artist. Photo Guy L'Heureux

**Montreal, September 15, 2020** – The arresting paintings of Haitian-born Montreal-based artist **Manuel Mathieu** draw viewers into a world of contrasts, tensions and poetry. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) is proud to host this engaged creator for his first solo exhibition in a North American museum. *Survivance* brings together some twenty paintings never before shown in Canada. The exhibition also features an installation created especially for the MMFA, in which the artist's roots and memories gradually reveal themselves, punctuating the vivid, striking compositions.

**Manuel Mathieu: Survivance**

A prolific multidisciplinary artist and recipient of the 2020 Sobey Art Award, Mathieu's creativity is fuelled by his life experiences. Certain works express insights gained during two periods of convalescence following serious accidents in both London and Montreal. Being forced to slow down, Mathieu claims these periods of confinement enabled him to grow, tap into his feelings and, consequently, better understand his place in the world and the importance of preserving the imagination of his native country.

These revelations led him to become interested in the impact of the genocidal Duvalier father-and-son dictatorships (1957 to 1986) on Haiti. Delving into his complex family history and the geopolitical context, Mathieu explores his identity from various angles: his maternal grandfather was a colonel in the early years of Jean-Claude Duvalier's rule, while several members of his father's family disappeared during the same regime. Mathieu, who views the dictatorship as collateral damage of the Cold War, does not see himself as an island in this world.

In *Survivance*, visitors will discover a fluid, expressive, quasi-Expressionist and sometimes even abstract painting style, revealing vaguely figurative references. We can also detect a conceptual approach, where ideas and issues are coded in various signs, the composition of the paintings and the vibrant, contrasting colours. Mathieu's work invites us to enter a dazzling world of intriguing colours, textures and shapes.

*"In his latest works, The Redemption, Frontiers and Ouroboros, Manuel Mathieu has ventured into unexplored territory, both formally and conceptually. He 'digs down into the verse,' as Mallarmé would have said. And that's what makes his process so fascinating and striking, since nothing is conceded in advance,"* says **Sylvie Lacerte**, Curator of Quebec and Canadian Contemporary Art at the MMFA and curator of the exhibition.

The title of the exhibition is inspired by Georges-Didi Huberman's *Survivance des lucioles [Survival of the Fireflies]* (2009), a book that had a profound effect on Mathieu. According to the author, the survival – and resilience – of fireflies, emitters of light, represent the keys to truth and freedom. For the artist, "Survivance" evokes the souls of those who have disappeared or what they have left behind.

This trace of what has been lived and what wills to endure permeates the artist's quest for identity. *"I come from a country with a rich and complex imagination. Between natural disasters and political instability, I often have the feeling that my memory is fading away. The places of my childhood are forever changed. This forces me to cultivate and feed my own imagination as I piece together my reality. I strive for inner peace because external reality is often unbearable,"* shares Mathieu. The thread of his thoughts provides the essential framework for his works.

*Survivance* is a searingly topical exhibition in this fragile, uncertain time, in which ethical questions on individual freedoms are being asked with unflinching directness.

#### **Publication**

In November 2020, a 170-page catalogue complementing the exhibition will be published in French and English by the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, in collaboration with the MMFA, under the direction of **Amin Alsaden** with the participation of **Sylvie Lacerte**. The book will be sold at the Museum's Boutique and Bookstore.

#### **Marie-Solange Apollon Fund**

Manuel Mathieu is also the driving force behind the first endowment to be dedicated to the acquisition of works by Quebec and Canadian artists whose oeuvre is under-represented or absent from the Museum's collection. Thanks to Manuel Mathieu's generosity and leadership, and support from other donors who share his vision, the Marie-Solange Apollon Fund came into being. It is named after his grandmother, who played a major role in the artist's life and who died of cancer in 2016. In addition to paying tribute to a beloved family member, the fund serves as a light to remind to all artists working in obscurity that their stories matter.

#### **Credits and curatorial team**

An exhibition organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and curated by Sylvie Lacerte, Curator of Quebec and Canadian Contemporary Art, MMFA.

#### **Acknowledgments**

Official Partners: Air Canada Air Canada and Denalt Paints, in collaboration with the MMFA's Young Philanthropists' Circle

Public Partners: Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, Canada Council for the Arts and Conseil des arts de Montréal.

### **Plan your visit to the MMFA**

In preparation for their Museum outing, visitors must book their tickets online and select the date and time of their visit. Museum Members must also reserve their tickets online, which are free, as admission is included in their membership. The MMFA's physical Ticket Counter remains closed. Wearing a face covering is mandatory. [Learn more.](#)

– 30 –

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Press Room: [mbam.qc.ca/en/press-room](http://mbam.qc.ca/en/press-room)

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### **About the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts**

Drawing over 1 million visitors annually, the MMFA is one of the most visited museums in Canada and North America. Its highly original temporary exhibitions combine various artistic disciplines – fine arts, music, film, fashion and design – and are exported to the four corners of the world. Its rich encyclopedic collection, displayed in its five pavilions, includes international art, arts of One World, 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 and one new wing: the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion in 2011, the Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion for Peace in 2016, and the Stephan Crétier and Stéphanie Maillery Wing for the Arts of One World in 2019. The MMFA complex also includes Bourgie Hall, a 460-seat concert hall, as well as an auditorium and a movie theatre. 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](http://mbam.qc.ca)