Le carnet : Histoires de l’art

Creativity, Conviviality, and Care: The Shift from Private to Public in Montreal’s Notman Garden

Créativité, convivialité et soin : Le passage du privé au public dans le Jardin Notman de Montréal.

Cynthia Hammond, professeur au Département d’histoire de l’art, Université Concordia

Volume 1, numéros 1 et 2, hiver et automne 2024

Femmes, Institutions, Espaces publics
Women, Institutions, Public Spaces

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Éditeur(s)

Edith-Anne Pageot, Professeure au Département d’histoire de l’art, UQÀM
Dominic Hardy, Professeur au Département d’histoire de l’art, UQÀM

ISSN

2560-7146 (numérique)

Keywords

Notman Garden, Milton-Parc neighbourhood, living heritage, Montreal, gender, aging, St. Margaret’s Home, Groupe de défense du jardin Notman, Golden Square Mile.

Mots-clés

Jardin Notman, quartier Milton-Parc, patrimoine vivant, Montréal, genre, vieillissement, Centre d'hébergement St-Margaret, Groupe de défense du Jardin Notman, mille carré doré.

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Citer ce document

Hammond, Cynthia. « Creativity, Conviviality, and Care: The Shift from Private to Public in Montreal’s Notman Garden ». Le Carnet : Histoires de l’art 1, nos 1 et 2 (2024) : 49-70, https://lecarnet.uqam.ca/actualite/le-carnet-vol-1-no-1-femmes-institutions-espaces-publics/

Abstract

This essay explores gender, aging, and the shifting line between public and private in Montreal’s “Notman Garden”. Located in the historic Milton-Parc neighbourhood, the garden behind the stately neoclassical house at 51 rue Sherbrooke Ouest was an integral part of St. Margaret’s Home, a palliative care facility that housed older women (and their pets) for almost a century. My 2019 oral history research-creation project on this garden led to interviews with women gardeners who helped to shape this green space into a garden for elderly women, as well as with activists who then fought for almost 30 years to protect that garden from development. In 2019 I exhibited my project in Milton-Parc at a moment when the garden’s future was uncertain. While the garden had just obtained official protection from the city, it was not yet clear whether its gendered history would survive. My work proposes that the shift from private garden to public space can and must account for the histories of women, aging, and care that are central to this garden's story.

Résumé de l’article

Cet essai explore le genre, le vieillissement, et la frontière entre l'espace public et privé dans le « Jardin Notman » de Montréal. Situé dans le quartier historique de Milton-Parc, en arrière de la majestueuse maison néoclassique au 51 Sherbrooke Ouest, le jardin faisait partie intégrante de l'institution « St. Margaret's Home », un établissement de soins palliatifs qui abritait des femmes aînées (et leurs animaux de compagnie) pendant près d'un siècle. Dans le cadre de ce projet de recherche-création, j'ai mené des entrevues auprès des jardiniers qui ont transformé cet espace et des militantes qui, pendant près de trente ans, ont lutté pour conserver ce jardin. En 2019, j'ai présenté mon projet dans le quartier Milton-Parc à un moment où l'avenir du jardin était incertain. Bien que le jardin venait d'obtenir une protection officielle de la ville, il n'était pas encore clair si son histoire des femmes survivrait. Mon intervention repose sur l’idée que le passage du statut de jardin privé à celui d’espace public puisse et doive tenir compte des histoires des femmes, du vieillissement, et des soins qui sont au cœur de l'histoire de ce jardin.

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Abstract

This essay explores gender, aging, and the shifting line between public and private in Montreal's "Notman Garden". Located in the historic Milton-Parc neighbourhood, the garden behind the stately neoclassical house at 51 rue Sherbrooke Ouest was an integral part of St. Margaret's Home, a palliative care facility that housed older women (and their pets) for almost a century. My 2019 oral history research-creation project on this garden led to interviews with women gardeners who helped to shape this green space into a garden for elderly women, as well as with activists who then fought for almost 30 years to protect that garden from development. In 2019 I exhibited my project in Milton-Parc at a moment when the garden's future was uncertain. While the garden had just obtained official protection from the city, it was not yet clear whether its gendered history would survive. My work proposes that the shift from private garden to public space can and must account for the histories of women, aging, and care that are central to this garden's story.

An elderly woman, perhaps in her 80s, sits in a garden (Figure 1). She is surrounded by plants, and the photographer has framed their view of her with the elaborate metalwork backing to the bench where she sits. She holds a black and white cat gently in her arms, and wears a floral dress, but with a heavy wool overcoat on top. She smiles or is starting to smile at whoever is taking the photograph, which is one of hundreds of photographs of women in this particular garden, known today as the "Notman" garden, after its one-time owner, celebrated Montreal photographer, William Notman (1826-1891). Yet this garden was for most of its existence a place of women: elderly women who ended their lives in the palliative care facility to which the garden was attached; labouring women who nursed, cleaned, and cared for both the patients and the architecture of the institution; women religious, who oversaw the entire facility, and women gardeners, who ensured that the garden in question would be welcoming and pleasurable for the institution's residents.

Figure 1. *Patient with cat in garden*, St Margaret's Home, 1946. Photographer unknown. Reproduced with permission of the Drummond Foundation.

That this was so can be understood from this image, because on a cool day – necessitating a wool coat – both the older woman in this photograph, and her cat-companion, seem glad to be outside.

The relationships between women, animals, and the boundary between public and private are poignantly underscored in garden history. In this essay, I explore gender, aging, and the shifting line between public and private in the "Notman Garden", a large, fenced garden located in the Milton-Parc neighbourhood of Montreal. The garden was, for most of its existence, an integral part of a palliative care facility, St Margaret's Home, which housed older women and their companion animals. The garden at St Margaret's boasted bright hues, a rich olfactory palette, and a diverse array of maturing trees. Archival photographs show how the garden played a key role in the residents' care, community, and conviviality, and were key to an oral history research-creation project that I undertook about this garden in 2019. At that time, no trace of the site's gendered history of care could be found at the garden, which was then surrounded by a padlocked, chain-link fence. To discover more about the garden's past, I interviewed a gardener who, alongside a group of women gardeners, shaped this plot of land into a space that would appeal to and benefit elderly women. I also interviewed two community

activists whose fight to protect the garden from real estate speculation spanned almost thirty years. These interviews and other archival research prompted a series of ten paintings, which I exhibited in Milton-Parc at a moment when the garden's future was uncertain. The city had just conferred official protection on the site, yet it was not clear what would become of the garden's rich biodiversity nor its legacy as a gendered space once it was redesigned to be "public". This essay brings into dialogue the oral histories, archival photographs, and the paintings that I produced, which together insist on the garden as a place of women's creativity, women's care, and women's aging. As such, my essay proposes that the shift from private garden to public space can and must account for the gendered histories that are the larger part of its story.

Gardens as sites of care

It is commonly understood that access to gardens, or "nature", benefits humans psychologically, physically, and even spiritually. Researchers have examined this truism, finding that where physical access to living landscapes is not possible, even being able to gaze upon a garden or other natural view is beneficial in terms of overall health, healing, and well-being (Ulrich, 1984; Verderber, 1986; Sherman *et al.*, 2005; Tang & Brown, 2006). Further, recent studies have shown that individuals who are marginalized or at greater risk, such as survivors of domestic violence or the elderly (Lygum, 2012), experience direct psychological and healing benefits from regular access to a garden or other spaces of biological life. Healing, restorative, and therapeutic gardens have a long, multicultural history that includes the cultivation of plants and herbs for medicinal purposes and the design of gardens for shared spiritual and community meaning (Cooper Markus & Sachs, 2013). But gardens have also been sites of particular importance for women. In addition to being places where women, historically, have shared knowledge and gained financial independence (Groag Bell, 1990; Horwood, 2010), gardens have also been locations that have foregrounded women's sensory and physical pleasure (Hammond, 2019). They have been spaces, furthermore, in which women exercised their political agency, sometimes even covertly, under the mantle of "acceptable" feminine pursuits such as gardening, flower-arranging, and botanical illustration (Hammond, 2012; Harris, 1994). As we shall see, in the case of the garden of St Margaret's Home, the therapeutic aspects of the institution's outdoor environment were tied to the garden's uses: it provided a social space for elderly female residents, their guests, and the predominantly female staff, while also offering sources of sensory pleasure. As a site of labour and care on the part of a dedicated group of women gardeners, the garden of St Margaret's House also manifests what Jean Burgess calls "vernacular creativity" (2006, p. 206), which is to say, "creativity beyond the economic context", which emphasizes "the social, community-based aspects of creativity" (Oates-Indruchová & Mikats, 2022, p. 703). Thus, I want to situate the gendered history of care that is part of this special garden's story as also intrinsically creative in nature. To understand how this garden came into being, and how it came to exist in a liminal state between public and private, it is important to go back through the garden's history, and its context.

The "Square Mile"

The neighbourhood of Milton-Parc is located close to the foot of Mount Royal, the city's largest public green space, and is within walking distance of the city's financial centre, making it prime real estate. This area once constituted the far eastern edge of the so-called "Square Mile" or more nostalgically, the "Golden Square Mile", the district that was, in the late-nineteenth century, the richest in Canada (Marsan, 1981/1990; Rémillard & Merrett, 1987)[1]. The influential and affluent lived in this neighbourhood during its heyday, and were predominantly anglophone, Protestant, and of Scottish heritage[2]. The key artery was Sherbrooke Street, still the city's longest east-west boulevard. From 1850-1930, spectacular mansions lined what was, then, a much narrower Sherbrooke, set well back from the horse-drawn carriages that would trot past. Mature elms bordered the street, framing the domestic landscape of each prestigious house (MacLeod, 1997, p. 176-177). Carrying forward the land's previous purpose as farmland and orchards, many of the mansions had stables, winter gardens or conservatories, and extensive gardens[3].

In 1845, slightly anticipating the development of the Square Mile, architect John Wells designed a grand, detached, neoclassical greystone building for a lot near Boulevard St-Laurent on Sherbrooke Street, for lawyer and later Supreme Court judge, Sir William Collis Meredith (Figure 2). The house at 51 Sherbrooke Street West is notable for its tripartite facade, symmetrical window arrangement, and elegant, columned portico on the ground storey (Heritage Montreal, N.d.). The landscaping consisted of two garden segments, both larger than the house, one facing Sherbrooke and one immediately behind the home. Both were arranged in formal, symmetrical patterns typical of the Victorian era. In addition, there were extensive side gardens, and a greenhouse beyond the ornamental, rear garden. In 1866 Alexander Molson, grandson of brewery magnate John Molson, purchased the house. He in turn sold it to William Notman in 1876, who lived in the house until his death in 1891.

Figure 2. Wm. Notman & Son, *William Notman's house*, Montreal, 1893. Gelatin silver glass plate negative. McCord Museum, 1893/08 II-102142. Image in the public domain.

Figure 3. 2022 view of Notman House and the red-brick extension by Andrew Thomas Taylor, 1894. Photo by the author.

The purpose and form of the property would change significantly following Notman's death. Sir George A. Drummond (1829-1910) and his wife, Lady Julia Drummond (1860-1942), took ownership in 1893 (Drummond Foundation, N.d.). They purchased the house to support the work of the Sisterhood of the Society of Saint Margaret, an Anglican order that ran St Margaret's Home for the Incurables, a nursing home for the aged and sick (founded 1883) (Drummond Foundation, N.d.).

This shift in purpose for the property can be readily understood within the extensive philanthropy of Lady Drummond, who was very active in public life, particularly in support of women's causes[4]. But this change can also be understood in the context of a swiftly morphing Montreal. The dramatic increases in population, and the intensification of Montreal's role as the North American hub for industrial activity and railway shipping, meant that economic inequities and other social issues had come to the fore. As Montreal's wealthiest citizens became even richer, the problems of the city's more vulnerable began to multiply, and philanthropic initiatives increased and diversified.

In 1894 the Drummonds hired their nephew, architect Andrew Thomas Taylor (1850-1937) to build a substantial new wing to the rear of John Wells' original building. Accommodating 50 patients, the new wing was tucked behind the administrative activities and nuns' residence, which would occupy the original greystone house (Drummond Foundation, N.d.) (Figure 3). Archival photographs show that there was an open ward on the top floor for patients needing more nursing, and private rooms on the lower floors, where more independent residents would have their own window, desk, bed, and personal items including art and photographs. A covered, glazed walkway connected the two wings via the second floor, and wooden balconies provided access to fresh air on the new pavilion's eastern façade. Taylor's gabled, Queen Anne addition, with its cladding of modest red brick and home-like peaked roof, declared a new era for 51 Sherbrooke Street West, one that shifted the purpose of the building and grounds away from the opulence and stature of the Square Mile towards more humble needs and charitable goals. This shift also represents a change in the caregiving landscape at the turn of the century. With the rise of the public hospital in the late nineteenth-century, and the growing view that citizens' health was a public concern, families were less likely to care for older members within the space of the home[5]. A respectable option for middle-class

women, one that would keep these women within the spatial orbit of the Square Mile, was increasingly needed.

While Anglican sisterhoods were not as common in Quebec as Catholic sisterhoods, St Margaret's linkage of religious and social vocation was not remarkable in Montreal, which was, historically, home to many religious charitable organizations that served as hospitals, orphanages, old-age homes, and poor-houses. In his study of the health systems in Québec, Marc-André St-Pierre explains,

> during the 19th century, hospital maintenance and funding, as well as care for the poor and destitute, fell to the municipalities, parishes and religious communities, with the help of government grants, charity fundraising campaigns and parish revenues. As well as running the great majority of institutions delivering health care and social assistance, the religious communities looked after training and employing para-medical and social services staff. (2009, p. 38)

Thus the "religious tradition of care" continued at St Margaret's Home (Emodi *et al.*, 1977, p. 4).

The spaces of St Margaret's Home were well staffed, compared to today's long-term care facilities. In 1973, for example, "five to seven nuns, a minimum of three nurses and 40 kitchen, laundry and maintenance workers" served 60 residents, meaning that St Margaret's Home boasted a ratio of 5 staff to every 6 patients (St Margaret Residential Centre, N.d.). This ratio does not include the volunteers who assisted the less-mobile patients in gaining access to one of St Margaret's central features: its "1000-square-metre green oasis" (Memento, N.d.). The addition by Taylor had left about half of the rear of the property intact. Figure 4 provides a beautiful view of the garden from 1946, showing it to have mown grass lawns, gravel paths arranged at right angles, elaborated with herbaceous borders, low shrubs, and a mixture of maple and lilac trees. Greystone houses on Milton Street can be seen in the background through chain-link fencing, and on the far right the façade of a purpose-built synagogue, an index of socio-cultural change in the area, can be made out. In the foreground the decorative bench from Figure 1 is visible. Its location made it an ideal place for resting, reading, speaking with a friend or visitor, or simply contemplating the garden.

The life of a garden

Road construction and enlargement would diminish the property's side and front gardens in the 1950s[6], but there nonetheless remained a slender, linear garden on Clark Street and a strip of garden along Sherbrooke, in addition to the main and quite substantial fenced garden to the rear. An aerial view from 1960 shows clearly how dominant the rear garden was, with two enormous (and rare) Kentucky Coffee trees and three Silver maples, which dwarf the surrounding arboreal growth (Figure 5).

Figure 4. *View of the garden at St Margaret's Home*, 1946. Photographer unknown. Reproduced with permission of the Drummond Foundation.

Figure 5. *Aerial view of St Margaret's Home*, 1960. Division de la géomatique, Ville de Montréal. Image in the public domain.

Yet the garden still has clear pathways and sunny areas, permitting the cultivation of flowers. All three gardens were well cared for, for over thirty years[7], by a gardening group called "The Diggers and Weeders Garden Club of Montreal" (D&W), who volunteered their time for St Margaret's Home after the Sisters approached them for help. This request was entirely in keeping with the D&W's history of community service; since 1932, when the organization was founded, they had worked with various community centres, veterans' associations, and religious communities, donating time, skills, plants, and tools[8]. According to Sarah Stevenson, past president of the D&W, after being asked to help, the gardeners "dug in" and the nuns "left us to our own devices". Stevenson recalls,

> We had the whole area ... including a circular flowerbed at the front ... and the lane that goes up that side [alley] of the house. [It] was covered with salt when it was plowed. So we looked for salt-tolerant plants ... we planted cedars. We always tried to cover all the seasons. Spring, summer, and autumn. And they [the plants] all came from our own gardens. (Stevenson, 2019)

The D&W recognized that the flowers that they painstakingly brought from their own homes, for the residents, were not purely ornamental. Rather, they had emotional and ritual value, helping the residents feel witnessed, remembered, and connected to the outside world, the cycle of the seasons, and the calendar of worship and celebration within the Protestant faith. Stevenson describes how the D&W understood the flowers to be "very important" to the "old ladies", how the D&W ensured that they received flowers at Christmas, Easter, and even Valentine's Day, when the gardeners tagged the plants "with a little message. And they [were] usually African Violets or something that will last for a while".

The care for the garden and its users extended to consideration of the ideal palette for St Margaret's Home, taking into account older people's lessening capacity to see colour.

> Stevenson: They used [the garden] all the time. We provided sunny areas and shaded areas. It was very popular.
> Interviewer: What kinds of colours were in the garden?
> Stevenson: They would have been as bright as possible. When you get old your sight diminishes.
> Interviewer: You didn't want a subtle garden?
> Stevenson: No, a "pow" one.

Archival photographs show the effects of this decision: spectacular tulips in hot pink, yellow, orange, and red stand in tall rows at the edges of the lawns; golden, violet, and crimson pansies and marigolds create lower borders, and tall hollyhocks frame views of women and dogs in the garden. Every inch of sunshine was put to its greatest floral advantage. And, in the shade, huge hostas and delicate Solomon's Seal created a rich contrast. This "pow" factor was undeniably part of the garden's appeal to its residents. An article about St Margaret's Home in *The Montreal Star*, from 16 July 1970, is another indication of the garden's importance. "Old folks need some aid," declares the article, explaining that, "The current appeal for assistance is for volunteers to join auxiliary members and staff in getting the old and handicapped patients into the garden to enjoy its shade and solace during the summer heat" (Old folks need some aid, 1970). For those living in a building without air conditioning in the heart of downtown Montreal, this garden with its mature trees and "pow" flowers would have been solace indeed. But the D&W also had direct contact with the residents. An article in the *Westmount Examiner* from 1983 shows two women sitting side by side, studying a small flower arrangement (one of the D&W's specialities). The caption reads,

> Sheila McCall, projects chairman of the Diggers & Weeders Club, shows one of her flower arrangements to Robertha [sic] McAlpine, a resident of St Margaret's Home. Miss McAlpine, 83, a victim of polio, who entered the home in 1949 with her mother after working 24 years with the YMCA, is a very active member of the auxiliary and crafts group. (McCall at St Margaret's, 1983, p. 10)

McAlpine had moved into St Margaret's at 50 years old. She had spent almost 35 years living there, at the time that this article was published.

The same article describes how "Members of the Diggers and Weeders Club spent time recently weeding and planting in preparation for the garden party to be held for the residents, their families, friends, and invited guests on Saturday, July 16, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of St Margaret's Home". The annual garden party was a major event at St Margaret's. Taking advantage of Montreal's short, hot summer, the party brought as many residents as possible

outdoors to enjoy the flowers, trees, and other special features of the garden, such as the pond, rock garden, and birdbath, all accompanied by formal tea. This was a moment when members of the Drummond family might visit, when St Margaret's Board members might attend, and when staff and residents would share in the garden together. A photograph from c. 1972 in the Drummond Foundation collection shows small groups of women clustered in chairs and wheelchairs around card tables. One of the Sisters of St Margaret is visible, as is a photographer, taking pictures.

That these garden parties were cherished events becomes especially clear when looking at photographs of the final garden party of July 1990, on St Margaret's Day (Figure 6). Members of the Board, staff, residents, and their families wore their best, many donning floral dresses for the occasion. A string quartet played on one of the rear balconies facing the garden, and the tables were draped in pink tablecloths. Helium-filled balloons in mint green, lavender, rose, white, and red bobbed above the heads of the attendees. Among the many photographs of this special day, women hug each other, smiling at one another with love (Figure 7).

What the images in the archives of the Drummond Foundation do not show is the dramatic change that marked Quebec's healthcare landscape from the late 1960s up until the early 1990s. The administration of the home had been secularized in 1975, at which time the Sisterhood of the Society of Saint Margaret withdrew from the operations of the institution (St Margaret Residential Centre, N.d.), and the home continued to operate for a time under the auspices of the Drummond Trust. In general, this was a period of transformation within the Quebec health system. Leaving the early-twentieth century charitable model behind, Quebec moved towards a state-funded, regulated, and increasingly decentralized system of health-care rights and delivery.

Figure 6. *St Margaret's final tea party, St Margaret's Day*, July 1990. Photographer unknown. Reproduced with permission of the Drummond Foundation.

Figure 7. *St Margaret's final tea party (II), St Margaret's Day*, July 1990. Photographer unknown. Reproduced with permission of the Drummond Foundation.

"The increase in health costs together with the budget restrictions and staff cutbacks imposed by the ... 1982 oil crisis forced the Department of Social Affairs to ensure a strict management of public funds" (St-Pierre, 2009, p. 40; see also Shapiro, 1992, p. 207; and chapter 20, p. 435-441). While long-term residences were generously funded in the 1960s, by the early 1980s costs had accelerated. Cracks were showing in the system, and "the terms resource reallocation, cut-backs and downsizing were increasingly heard" (St-Pierre, 2009, p. 40). Then, "In 1986, the Quebec government decided to build a new home to be named the Saint Margaret Residence" (St Margaret Residential Centre, N.d.). "Not long after that",

> there was a merger between Saint Margaret and the Good Shepherd Home, which was a residence for men. On March 22, 1991, the Saint Margaret Residence was moved from 51 Sherbrooke Street to its current location on 50 Hillside Avenue in Westmount. (*ibid.*)

The garden that the D&W had tended to with such care was left to grow over, and nearly a century of emplaced memories was all but lost. Of the new residence, Sarah Stevenson remarks, "no one walks around that garden".

The sale of Notman House threw the building's historic protection into question. A 30-year, citizen-led battle ensued, first to save the house, and then, to save the garden. This battle was led by the Communauté Milton-Parc, a powerful citizen-led organization that successfully fought to save the buildings of St Margaret's Home[9]. But the garden was another matter. It would take decades to convince the City of Montreal that a comparatively small green space and what looked like a tangle of old trees were worth saving. Anne-Marie Boucher lived directly across from the garden on Milton. She says that she had never been part of any organizing until the future of the garden came under threat. She gradually realized what was at stake, and over time became the leader of the Groupe de défense du jardin Notman, a role she held until 2015. She recalls how important the trees were to her, and how little anyone seemed to care for them:

> First and foremost it was the trees. At the beginning it was the three architectural [development] proposals, which included plans to cut down the trees. I was against that. Everyone was against it. Even the City of Montreal sent experts to analyze the trees, the quality of the trees ... It was such a beautiful environment ... In the three development proposals there were some that said they would keep a few of the trees, others said they would cut them all down ... we fought very hard for those trees. (Boucher, 2019, my translation)

Tony Antakly, another long-term Milton Street resident, took over from Boucher when she stepped back from activism in 2015. He also noted the centrality of the trees as part of the complex's capacity to be a "witness to the past" (Antakly, 2019). He recalls,

> These are the old mansions that disappeared, many of them, or their gardens disappeared. Notman's property is one of the early ones in the nineteenth century. So [we had] to keep that house as a witness of the past … I couldn't imagine that anybody could destroy the 100-year-old trees. I couldn't imagine, and [to] build an ugly cement [building]. I mean that's unimaginable, when the trend around the world is to preserve historic sites. To destroy it was like an antagonism, like a contradiction of the modern trend worldwide. (Antakly, 2019)

Happily, in 2018 the activists' efforts were finally rewarded. The City of Montreal agreed to protect the land from further development, and to eventually transform it into a public park. This was a wonderful outcome after so much effort, and on the part of so many. However, the saving of the garden with the intent to create a "public park" raises questions about the garden's living heritage. How will its trees, its few remaining flowers, the animals and birds for whom the garden is home be treated? Will the history of the garden as a space for older women become an integral part of the new design? Will a water feature destroy the one tulip that has survived since the era of the Diggers and Weeders?

Artist residency/painting project

In response to these questions, and inspired by my interviews and archival research, I began an artist residency in January 2019 in a community centre in the Milton-Parc neighbourhood. The Association Récréative de Milton-Parc welcomed my project, which was to find and interview local citizens who had played a role in the cultivation or protection of the garden, and to create a series of ten paintings that explored different moments in the gendered history of this small but vital landscape. Figure 8 shows the largest painting in the Notman Garden series, *Patrimoine vivant* ("*living heritage*", 2019). It collapses various chapters in the history of local activism and organizing. In the foreground on the left is Anne-Marie Boucher, one of the most important figures in the effort to save the garden, pictured today. On the far right in the foreground is Colette Quesnel, who was frequently interviewed and photographed during the fight to save Notman House, pictured in 2001. Towards the rear, to the right, are James Dormeyer and Tony Antakly, who were heavily involved in the work of preserving the garden. And in the centre foreground is Lucia Kowaluk (1935-2019), one of Milton-Parc's best-known activists, who fought for the preservation of the neighbourhood and the residents' right to the city for over five decades. The original house by John Wells, and the new wing by Andrew Taylor can be seen in a soft outline. But it is the activists and the plants that are bursting with life and colour.

Figure 8. Cynthia Hammond, *Patrimoine vivant*, 2019. Acrylic gouache and pencil on canvas. 48 x 60". Collection of the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, Concordia University.

As Annmarie Adams explains in the exhibition catalogue we produced for this project, the term "living heritage" was a phrase used by several activists involved in the garden's preservation (Hammond & Adams, 2019, p. 8). The term captures the all-important inclusion of trees and plants as historic entities. Inspired by this idea, I included in this painting only those species that grew or were planted in the garden; from left to right we see white pine, salvia (a healing plant native to Mexico), honey locust (native to the central US), ageratum, impatiens (native to tropical areas in Asia), pansies (native to Europe), lobelia (native to midwestern US), and silver maple. And the balloons are not whimsy. In my research I found a newspaper article about a protest against one of the proposed developments in the 1990s. The accompanying photograph shows the protesters proudly carrying balloons as well as signs – perhaps an unintended homage to the years of garden parties at St Margaret's.

If the balloons in this painting draw an indirect link to the garden parties, another painting in the series speaks directly to these joyous collective events that transformed the garden every year (Figure 9). When I first visited the Notman Garden in October 2018, it was shaded by its canopy of mature trees, and the 14-storey apartment building to the west. With the late fall sunshine illuminating the bright fall foliage all around the garden, I was struck by the quality of light. The garden was darker than its surroundings, but not sombre. On the contrary, the relative darkness brought every leaf, every colour, into relief. I wanted the paintings in my series to echo this rich darkness and vivid colour, which left me with the impression that the garden was illuminated from within. At the same time, I wanted to show how the garden had supported the women who frequented its space for so long. In *Shade and Solace* (*Garden Party*) I draw from the hundreds of photographs of the annual garden parties, taking care to show how the residents wore their best clothes, and in so doing became part of the garden's beauty. The title of this work is also a reference to *The Montreal Star* article of 16 July 1970,

calling for volunteers to help carry women into the garden, to enjoy the "solace" of its shaded, cooler space. There is also a reference, in the lower-left hand corner, to the many companion animals that were captured in photographs over the course of the century.

Figure 9. Cynthia Hammond, *Shade and Solace* (*Garden Party*), 2019. Acrylic gouache and pencil on canvas. 36 x 48". Private collection.

Figure 10. Cynthia Hammond, *Une militante improvisée*, 2019. Acrylic gouache and pencil on canvas. 36 x 36". Private collection.

Une militante improvisée (Figure 10) is an homage to Anne-Marie Boucher. Drawing from a photograph of Boucher from a newspaper clipping in her files, I created this portrait of the activist near her home, trimming her clematis. The title refers to her description of herself during our interview as "une militante improvisée," a woman who never planned to become an activist but who did so through her slow-burning love of living, growing things. A ghostly figure of Julia Drummond stands backlit in the garden, drawing a circle between two women who believe, or believed, in the healing powers of nature. This and other paintings in my series responded to the fact that, in the garden, in 2019, there was no commemoration of any of these individuals, nor of the hundreds of women who shaped, tended to, and used the garden for almost a century.

In the public consultation document produced by the City of Montreal following its decision to protect the garden, eight "Enjeux d'aménagement" are listed, that is to say development issues to be taken into account as the garden shifts from a privately-owned space of biodiversity to a public green space: Spirit of place; Uses; Pathways; Fencing; Furniture; Lighting; Context and Links between the garden and the Notman House (Le Plateau-Mont-Royal, N.d., my translation). Note that the history of the site, while otherwise explored in this public consultation document, is not mentioned. The final page of the document simply reads, "Your ideas? General vision rather than details". I took this directive to heart when planning to exhibit my paintings in the spring of 2019.

Luckily, I found a venue to exhibit the work right in Milton-Parc: the exhibition room of the School of Architecture at McGill University, which is less than a ten-minute walk from the former St Margaret's Home. I gave a talk at the vernissage, to which I invited people from the community who had participated in my project. These and other individuals – including architect and heritage activist, Phyllis Lambert – shared their perspectives on the work of saving the garden. In addition to being overjoyed to welcome Anne-Marie Boucher, Colette Quesnel, Tony Antakly, and Phyllis Lambert to the event, I was delighted when interim mayor of the Plateau, Alexander Norris attended, to whom I gave my view that the garden should become again a therapeutic garden for the elderly.

One of the limitations of this research is that the voices of the residents of St Margaret's Home themselves are missing from the record that I have been able to assemble. In this regard, my work on this special landscape is guilty of Nancy Christie's criticism of the history of medicine more broadly: "the attitudes of the sick themselves have remained largely absent" (2007, p. 373). I wish that I had been able to meet and speak with the last generation of residents of St Margaret's Home, to ask them directly what impact the garden had on their wellbeing, and what they would like to see in a healing garden for the elderly, in whatever comes to pass for this garden in future. However, I was fortunate to interview Tony Antakly who is, in addition to his activism on behalf of the garden, a leading researcher on health and pain. He put into words why a healing garden for the elderly is so important:

> [The garden was] a place where the patient who was at the end of her life ... could sit down, and relax and reflect, feel good. That's the healing part. If you look at a piece of ugly cement, you won't feel anything. But if you look at a beautiful flower ... something lively, natural, and nice to look at, that's why flowers are important. Not only greenery, but flowers. This is the healing part. And since these women were at the end of their lives, it's important that they felt good at the end.

Conclusion - St Margaret's Forest?

When I welcomed the former activists to my exhibition in June 2019, the term "Covid-19" did not yet exist. Since that time, the number of senior citizens who died of the coronavirus was double that of any other vulnerable category. Long-term nursing institutions and seniors' homes were most dramatically hit by the global pandemic. Research has shown that the numbers were worse in institutions which had shared rooms, staff that rotated between more than one nursing home, and a low staff to patient ratio, among other factors (Clarke, 2021). The situation has been so dire that there is now a $500-million class-action lawsuit against the provincial government "over the treatment of residents of long-term care centres" (Derfel, 2019; see also Authier, 2018). What if all the residents in long-term care in Quebec had had a situation like that of St Margaret's Home instead, with its private rooms, plentiful staff, balconies, windows that opened, and above all, its large garden?

In their series of articles on Notman House for *The Gazette* in the early 1990s, architectural historians Susan Bronson and Annmarie Adams observed that the sisterhood who ran the complex and tended to the residents also looked after the buildings and grounds, a fact that partially accounts for the classification of the original building as a historic monument in 1979 (K4). Photographs in the Drummond Foundation and archives of the McCord Stewart museum bear out this account of responsible maintenance over the institution's almost 100 years of existence. But they also show an intimate, even tender cultural landscape of care, in which the garden plays a central role. These photographs evoke Guiliana Bruno's description of an historic, gendered aspect of the western garden, as a space that early modern women used for private enjoyment and as a place to receive visitors (cited in Bhatti *et al.*, 2014, p. 44). The photographs of laughing, peaceful, smiling older women, surrounded by biological and animal life, provide a distinct contrast to the contemporary image of the "old age home" as a space that is aesthetically, therapeutically, and emotionally bereft.

The creative labour that made St Margaret's Home, and garden, what they were should not be underestimated. "We have to work hard for the enchantment a garden can offer", say garden researchers Mark Bhatti, Andrew Church, and Amanda Claremont (2014, p. 46). As a private, formal garden, an institutional, healing garden, and a site of successful community organizing, the small urban landscape behind 51 Sherbrooke St West manifests a compelling, layered history of different kinds of work within a gendered space. And yet it is also a "paradoxical space" in the sense used by geographer Robyn Longhurst, who writes, "gardens are spaces that transgress the categories of culture and nature. They are simultaneously public and private … They are sites of work and leisure: 'labours of love'. And they are inscribed by colonial and postcolonial discourses" (2006, p. 589). All this can be said of the Notman Garden, which is located on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory – another fact that has yet to be acknowledged within its space. Of the eight species I included in my painting described above, only two are

native to this part of Quebec. The rest are part of the movement of species and the violence of ideas that characterize the history of colonialism.

In many ways the garden that has survived the era of St Margaret's Home is part of a history of privilege. Yet the plants found in the garden today, as well as its gendered history of care, are inscribed in a less visible history, namely the history of the relationships between older citizens and living urban landscapes, and between women and gardens. These relationships are extremely vulnerable to historical amnesia. Feminist garden historian Susan Groag-Bell observes,

> Garden, art, and literary historians have for so long focused on the monumental rather than the commonplace, the unusual rather than the ongoing. They have been preoccupied with the creation and growth of the landscape park to the point that they have lost sight of the flower garden ... the flower gardens of women ... live mostly in their letters, in their garden notebooks, in their botanical paintings, and in their embroideries. (1990, p. 481)

As I review my hundreds of photographs of the Drummond Foundation and the Diggers and Weeders collections, I am aware that women's history is easily forgotten. Gardens are, as St Margaret's proves, ephemeral forms of culture, all the more so once abandoned. Even its current naming – the "Notman" garden – is a kind of erasure of most of the garden's history.

Since my exhibition ended in 2019, there have been efforts to animate the area surrounding the garden, and to draw attention to its multiple histories. Part of Milton and Clark streets are now dedicated to seating and raised planters, thus echoing the century of outdoor respite and gardening that is otherwise difficult to discern from the site beyond the fence. A series of didactic panels explore the site's history as an example of Square Mile architecture, providing information on the garden's years as part of St Margaret's Home. While there is no mention of the Diggers and Weeders' work on behalf of the Home, a nice touch is that a low platform has been made wheelchair accessible. The area has been branded as "Les Salons St Margaret" (Figure 11) and is a citizen-led project under the mantle of Les Jardins collectifs de Milton Parc, which is dedicated to "green initiatives and urban agriculture in the Milton Parc neighbourhood," to combatting food scarcity, and to improving the "quality of life and resilience of our community" (Les Jardins collectifs de Milton Parc, 2021).

Figure 11. 2022 view of "Les Salon St Margaret" outside the fence that surrounds the garden of the former St Margaret's Home. Photo by the author.

Figure 12. St Margaret's forest? Photo by the author (2022).

As long as the didactic panels, the planters, and the neon signage saying "St Margaret's" remain, there is a visual and informative link between the larger site and the experiences and labour of women that shaped this garden for decades, just as the seating and new planting provide a most welcome bridge to the past and show how living landscapes can be places of biodiversity, continuity, and transformation. However, the garden itself, as an entity that has lived through many different historical moments, and which is a witness to these pasts, must be given full consideration as well. It has become something that none of the original architects, neither the Drummonds, the Sisters of St Margaret, nor even the Diggers and Weeders anticipated. It has become what the activists sought to save: in effect, a tiny forest, supporting many species and providing sweet clean air in an otherwise intense part of Montreal's downtown. As a forest, it has its own intelligence, resilience, historicity, and – as forestry experts are increasingly striving to show[10] – kinships, vital for its own survival, and for ours.

I undertook most of the work on the Notman Garden series from January through to May 2019, and was lucky to be working in close proximity to the garden itself. Spring came very late that year, after a long and bitterly cold winter. On one of my visits in May, the garden had started to green again. Right in the centre of the garden, was one beautiful red tulip, undoubtedly a trace of the many years in which the Diggers and Weeders had sought to bring colour, scent, and beauty to the residents of St Margaret's Home. A few weeks later, the trees started to bud, and the thick, high canopy began to form, meaning that there would be few, if any, other flowers to be found for the rest of the summer. But the flower did bloom; it had enough sunshine to do exactly what the Diggers and Weeders hoped it would do.
This tulip showed me a way in which St Margaret's Garden, and St Margaret's Forest, could occupy the same space, each in its own season. What I learned from this project, and what I hope the future of the garden holds, is the recognition that humans also need to limit their

"season" in the garden. Perhaps the garden could become a most radical thing in the age of climate change: a "public" garden-forest whose delicate biological balance is always-already more important than human wishes and desires. This, to me, would be the greatest homage to the women residents who loved this space, the women caregivers who shared in this space, the gardeners who shaped this space's colours and scents, and the activists who fought for and achieved the simple but potent fact of the garden's continued existence.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support and collaboration of many people. I am first and foremost deeply grateful to Dr Annmarie Adams, who contributed to the exhibition catalogue, for engaging in this and other garden collaborations with me. I am also grateful for the support of the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Canadian Art Studies, and the Peter Guo-hua Fu School of Architecture of McGill University, for supporting the research and 2019 exhibition. I want to thank the Association Récréative de Milton-Parc for the warm welcome during my residency in 2019, and all the individuals who shared memories, knowledge, or gave help in some way to my project: Helen Angelopoulos, Tony Antakly, Anne-Marie Boucher, Haley Jenkins-Crumb, the Drummond Foundation, William Fong, Samantha Leger, Doreen Lindsey, Kate Marley, Nathan McDonnell, Bruce McNiven, Sarah Stevenson, and especially Doug Dumais and Jason Levy.

Notes

1. The names "Golden Square Mile" and "Square Mile" (also le mille carré and le mille carré doré in French) were employed to describe the area once the district's heyday had passed. In the nineteenth century, it was simply known as "Uptown" or "New Town" (See Mackay, 1987, p. 8).

2. That said, as Roderick MacLeod points out, "The presence of servants in these households, significantly qualifies statistics about GSM [Golden Square Mile] residents". Servants sometimes outnumbered residents in the grander houses, and these servants were usually Catholic and sometimes French speaking (See MacLeod, 1997, p. 230).

3. Gardens were very important to the visual and spatial qualities of the Square Mile. Julia Gersovitz notes that some families, upon purchasing multiple adjacent lots for the purpose of building a prestigious villa, would demolish existing, more modest houses in order to create larger gardens (1981, p. 12). While the gardens of the Square Mile were a key means by which elite families conveyed their stature, the scholarly focus to date has been on the private houses, in large part because of the dramatic loss of much of this heritage in the 1960s and 1970s.

4. With her husband, Lady Drummond would create the Charity Organization of Montreal, which tackled issues of poverty and welfare in the city. Lady Drummond was also co-founder of, and served as first president for, the Women's Canadian Club of Montreal (1907-08). She was awarded the British Red Cross Medal for her extensive services during WWI. Lady Drummond was particularly interested in the positive social effects of parks and playgrounds (See Wolfe & Strachan, 1988, p. 65-80).

5. Nancy Christie explores this idea in detail in her essay about the Ladies' Protestant Home of Quebec, which may be seen as a working-class parallel to St Margaret's Home (2007, p. 371-391).

6. Historic fire insurance maps from 1951 and 1957 show that Clark Street had been extended north to Milton, and that Sherbrooke had been substantially widened. It was during these same years that St Margaret's Home added a "gardener's cottage" to the rear of the property, consisting of an apartment above and a garage and storage area below. While somewhat derelict, the cottage has survived to this day and is a testament to the importance of the garden for the facility. Sarah Stevenson recalls using the alleyway to the west of St Margaret's Home to bring plants and materials onsite and using the lower level of the cottage for storage (Stevenson, 2019).

7. Different sources give different dates for when the D&W began their long association with St Margaret's Home. Sarah Stevenson recalls that the gardening period was about 30 years, meaning that the organization began to contribute their time either in the late 60s or very early 70s.

8. The D&W also "held flower shows, workshops, garden tours, luncheons, plant exchanges" and "for many years, the lobby of the Montreal General Hospital and the halls of Montreal museums like the Château Ramezay were decorated by the club's members" (McCord Museum, N.d.). The archives of this very active group are held at the Musée McCord (1932-2005), but their initiatives continue. See https://www.diggersandweeders.org

9. The Communauté Milton-Parc had a powerful track record with regard to protecting the built environment within the Milton-Parc neighbourhood. In the 1970s and 80s, they saved six city blocks, which comprise the largest housing cooperative in North America to this day (Helman, 1987; Kowaluk & Piché-Burton, 2012).

10. Simard, Suzanne. (2021). *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*. Toronto: Penguin.

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