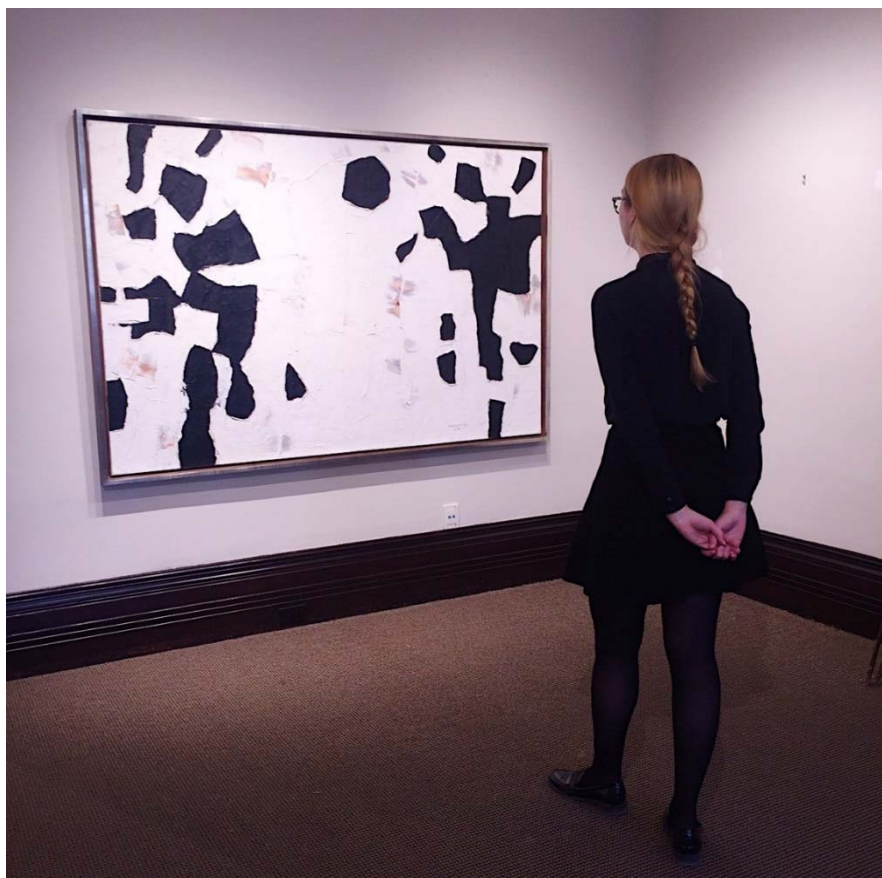


## Art History: Borduas' *Figures Schématiques*

Marie-Hélène Busque, February 8, 2018

Executed in 1956, Paul-Émile Borduas's masterpiece *Figures schématiques* (estimated \$3,000,000 - \$5,000,000 CAD) leads Heffel's Spring Live Auction.



TORONTO, February 8, 2018 | Towering over its viewers at 51 ½ inches high by 76 ¾ inches wide, Paul-Émile Borduas's masterpiece *Figures schématiques* will be the highlight of this spring's Canadian art auction season.

This work belongs to a group of paintings completed between August and September 1956, when the artist was living in Paris. After *3+4+1* (which measures 78 ½ x 98 ¼ inches), it is the largest canvas of this series.

In a letter dated November 28, 1956, addressed to Gisèle and Gérard Lortie, Borduas wrote "Did I mention that everything painted after your visit was purchased by the Martha Jackson Gallery of New York, in early September?" The Lorties' visit in question was in August 1956, which only left a short but productive period of time before Martha Jackson's visit on September 5, 1956.

Their meeting was successful, as Jackson purchased nine of his works: *3+4+1*, *Froufrou aigu*, *3+3+2*, *Vigilance grise*, *Le chant des libellules*, *La bouée*, *Clapotis blanc et rose*, *La boucle couronnée* and of

course, *Figures schématiques*. All these works were to be included in the gallery's show *Paul-Émile Borduas: Paintings 1953 – 1956*, held from March 18 to April 6, 1957.

A superlative example of the artist's celebrated Black and White period abstractions, *Figures schématiques* is a chorus of black and white planes that lure the viewer in like a magnet. However, this work is far from two-toned. Soft greys and corals appear throughout the canvas - but take a closer look. You will find a myriad of tiny coloured specks hiding in the ripples of white paint: blues, greens, reds and browns.



*Figures schématiques*, details

Out of the fifteen works included in the 1957 Martha Jackson show, *Figures schématiques* was chosen as the exhibition catalogue's cover. The show received quite a bit of praise, and articles reviewing it were written in the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *New York Times* and *ArtNews*.

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In his essay that will be published in Heffel's Spring Live Auction catalogue, art historian François-Marc Gagnon writes: "It is rare that a painting of this importance appears on the market, especially one from Borduas' Black and White period in Paris. This work is perhaps the largest Borduas canvas in private hands." David K.J. Heffel, President of Heffel, says "Personally, this monumental, powerful Borduas is one of the most exciting paintings Heffel will have the honor to offer to the global art market. Quite simply, it is the best of the best."

Borduas was instrumental in shaping and influencing artists – and Quebec art in general – during the late 1940s and 1950s. He was the author of the *Refus global* manifesto (published in 1948 and co-signed by fifteen other artists). Not only was this document the driving force behind the Automatist movement, but it is now regarded as a milestone in the modernization of Quebec, exposing it to the cosmopolitan ideas of the Post-War era.

The manifesto was strongly criticized at the time, and the price Borduas had to pay was high: he was dismissed from his teaching position at the *École du Meuble* in Montreal. This pushed him to move to

New York, then to Paris in 1955, where he executed *Figures schématiques* the following year, a masterpiece from an important period in the artist's career.

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