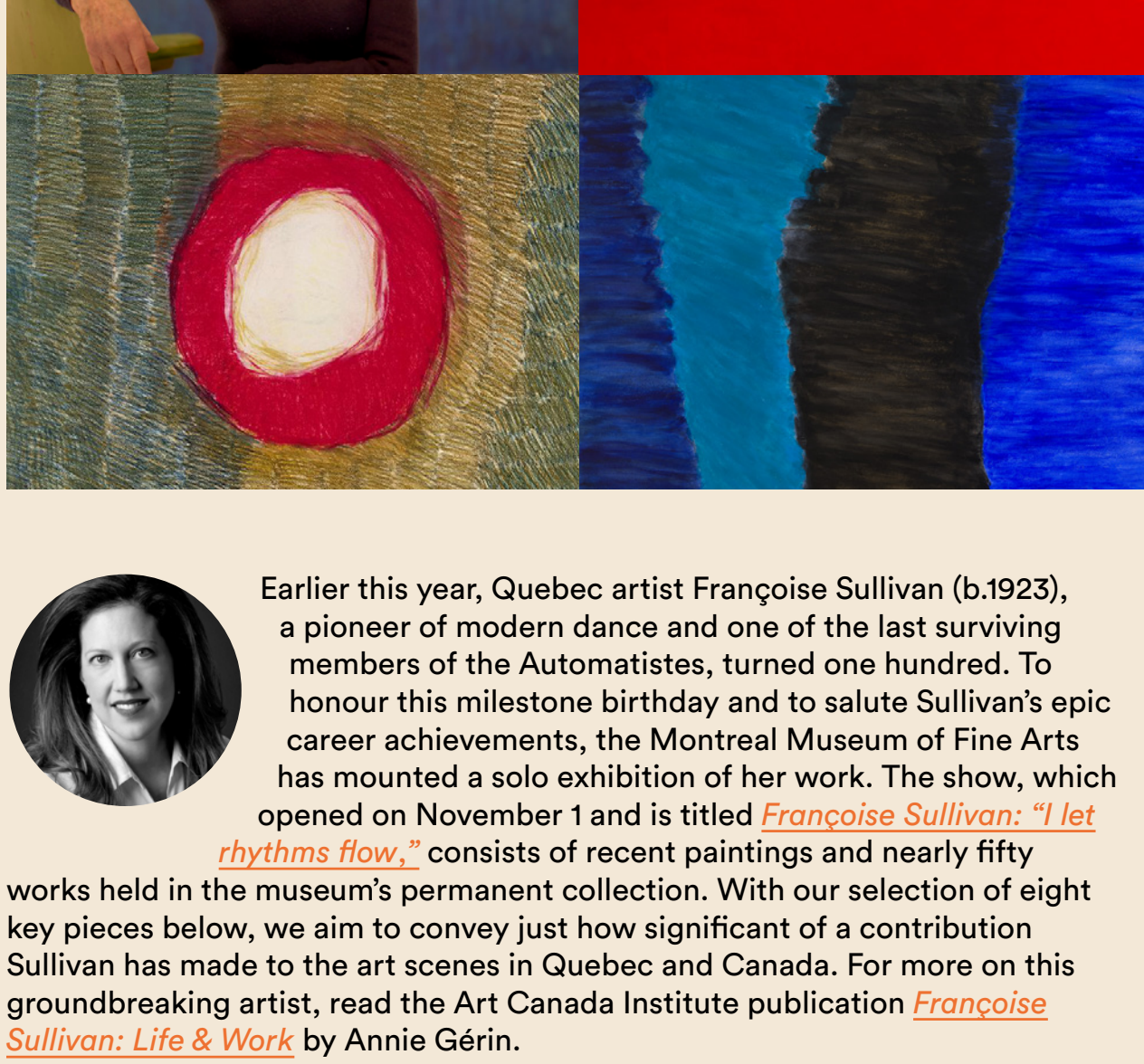


NOVEMBER 17, 2023

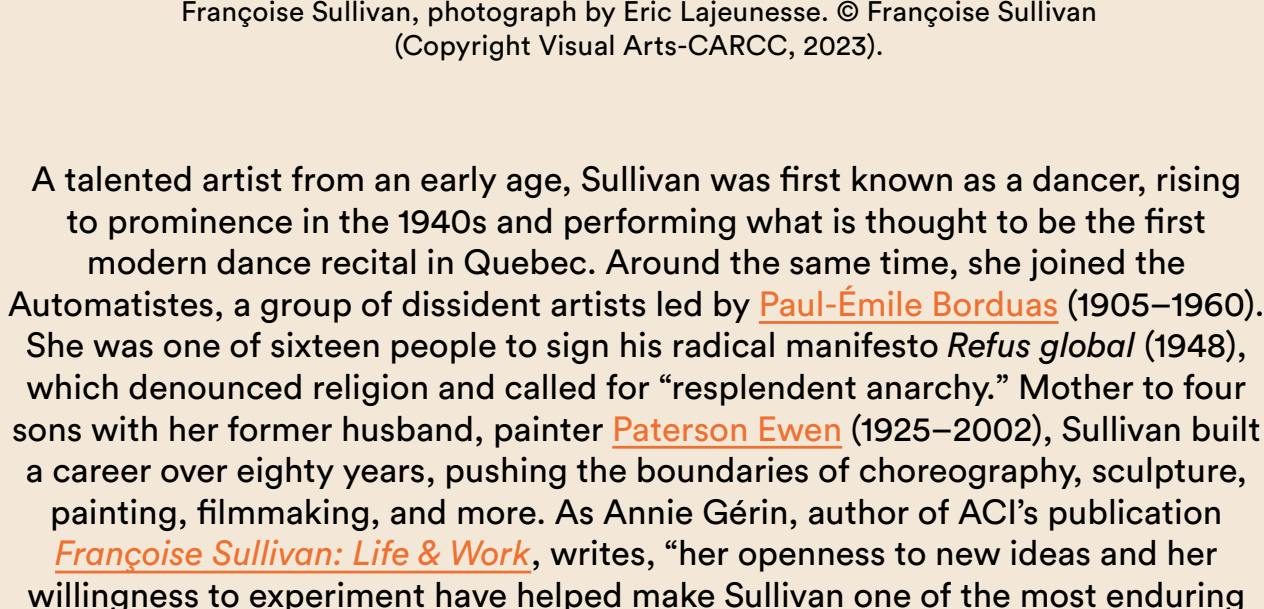
FRANÇOISE SULLIVAN AT 100
PIONEER OF ART & DANCE

Still producing work in her eleventh decade, acclaimed Quebec sculptor, painter, photographer, and modern dancer Françoise Sullivan celebrated her one hundredth birthday this past June. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is honouring her singular career with a new exhibition of recent paintings as well as major works from its collection.



Earlier this year, Quebec artist Françoise Sullivan (b.1923), a pioneer of modern dance and one of the last surviving members of the Automatistes, turned one hundred. To honour this milestone birthday and to salute Sullivan's epic career achievements, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has mounted a solo exhibition of her work. The show, which opened on November 1 and is titled [Françoise Sullivan: "I let rhythms flow,"](#) consists of recent paintings and nearly fifty works held in the museum's permanent collection. With our selection of eight key pieces below, we aim to convey just how significant of a contribution Sullivan has made to the art scenes in Quebec and Canada. For more on this groundbreaking artist, read the Art Canada Institute publication [Françoise Sullivan: Life & Work](#) by Annie Gérin.

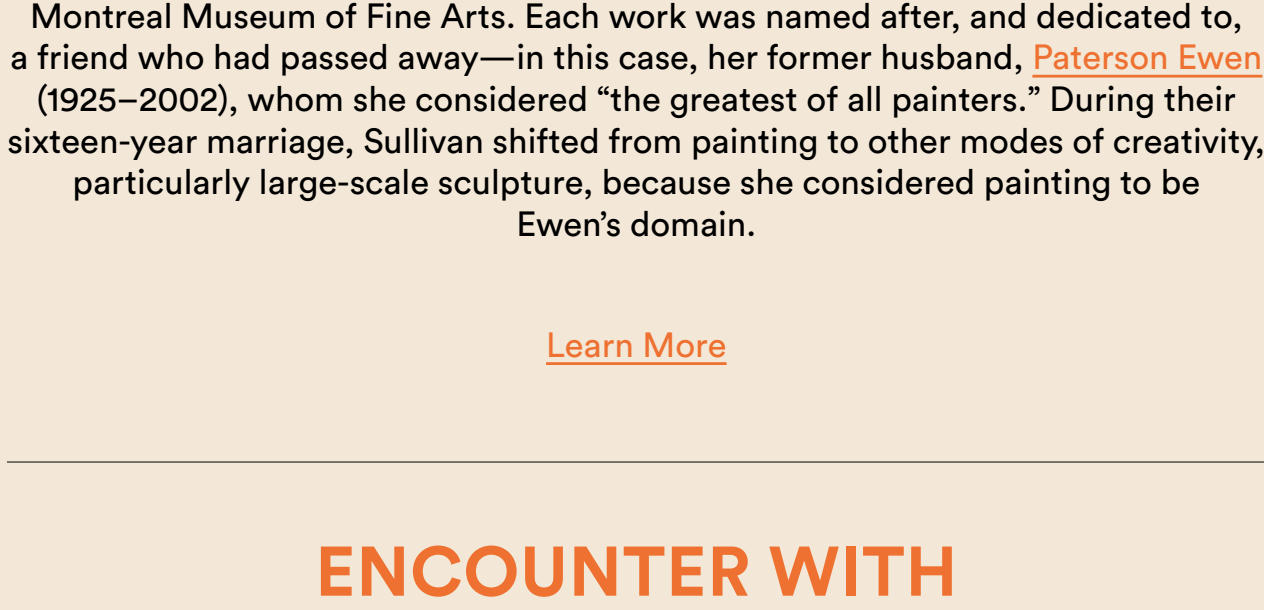
Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

A PIONEER OF AVANT-GARDE ART
AND DANCE

Françoise Sullivan, photograph by Éric Lajeunesse. © Françoise Sullivan
(Copyright Visual Arts-CARCC, 2023).

A talented artist from an early age, Sullivan was first known as a dancer, rising to prominence in the 1940s and performing what is thought to be the first modern dance recital in Quebec. Around the same time, she joined the Automatistes, a group of dissident artists led by [Paul-Émile Borduas](#) (1905–1960). She was one of sixteen people to sign his radical manifesto *Refus global* (1948), which denounced religion and called for "resplendent anarchy." Mother to four sons with her former husband, painter [Paterson Ewen](#) (1925–2002), Sullivan built a career over eighty years, pushing the boundaries of choreography, sculpture, painting, filmmaking, and more. As Annie Gérin, author of ACI's publication [Françoise Sullivan: Life & Work](#), writes, "her openness to new ideas and her willingness to experiment have helped make Sullivan one of the most enduring and innovative artists working in Canada."

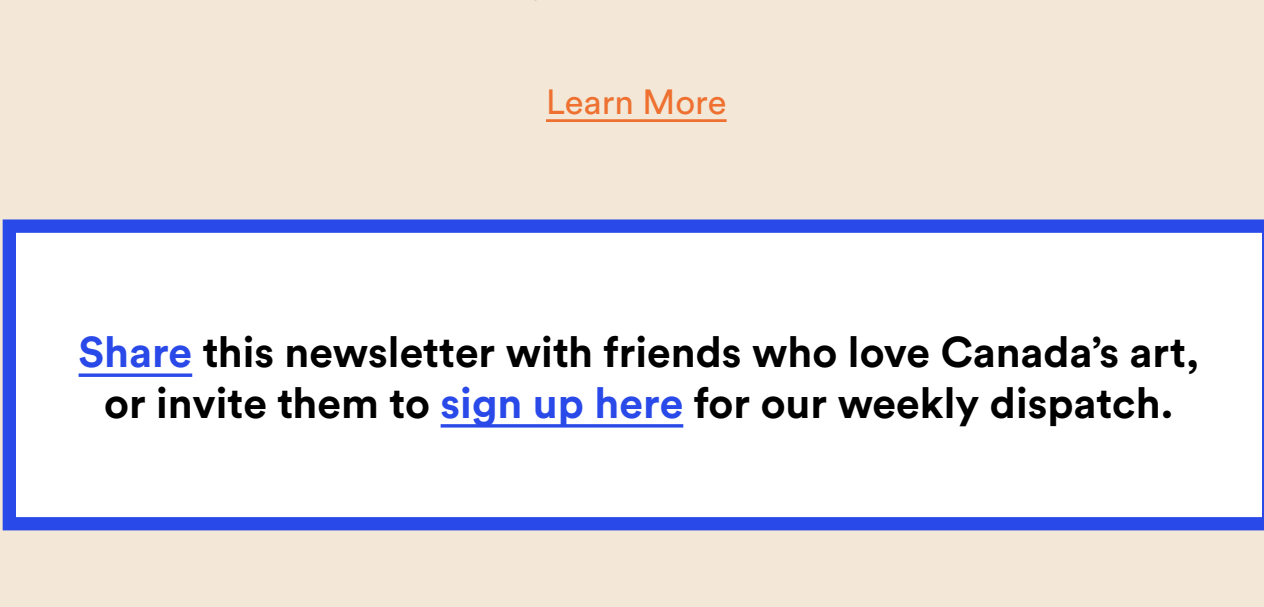
HOMAGE TO PATERSON



Françoise Sullivan, *Hommage à Paterson (Hommage to Paterson)*, 2003, collection of the artist.
© Françoise Sullivan / CARCC 2023.

The red and orange panels of this monumental diptych seem to hum with warmth, passion, and deep emotion. Titled *Hommage à Paterson (Hommage to Paterson)*, 2003, it is the largest piece in Sullivan's series of monochromatic *Hommages* paintings, which she unveiled during her 2003 retrospective at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Each work was named after, and dedicated to, a friend who had passed away—in this case, her former husband, [Paterson Ewen](#) (1925–2002), whom she considered "the greatest of all painters." During their sixteen-year marriage, Sullivan shifted from painting to other modes of creativity, particularly large-scale sculpture, because she considered painting to be Ewen's domain.

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ENCOUNTER WITH
ARCHAIC APOLLO

Françoise Sullivan, *Encounter with Archaic Apollo*, 1974, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
© Françoise Sullivan / CARCC 2023.

This photomontage series features an image of the Greek deity Apollo—who symbolizes music, purification, and beauty—laid over photographic documentation of Sullivan's 1973 performance [Walk among Oil Refineries \(Promenade parmi les raffineries de pétrole\)](#), which took place on the eve of the October 1973 oil crisis. By pairing the hulking tanks with the idealized figure of a god, and by inserting herself into the narrative, Sullivan comments on the role of an artist in a world that ranks industry and progress above humanity and beauty. She "has always been keenly interested in the impact humans have on the natural environment," writes Annie Gérin. "Had she not become an artist, she most certainly would have joined the environmentalist movement."

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REDS

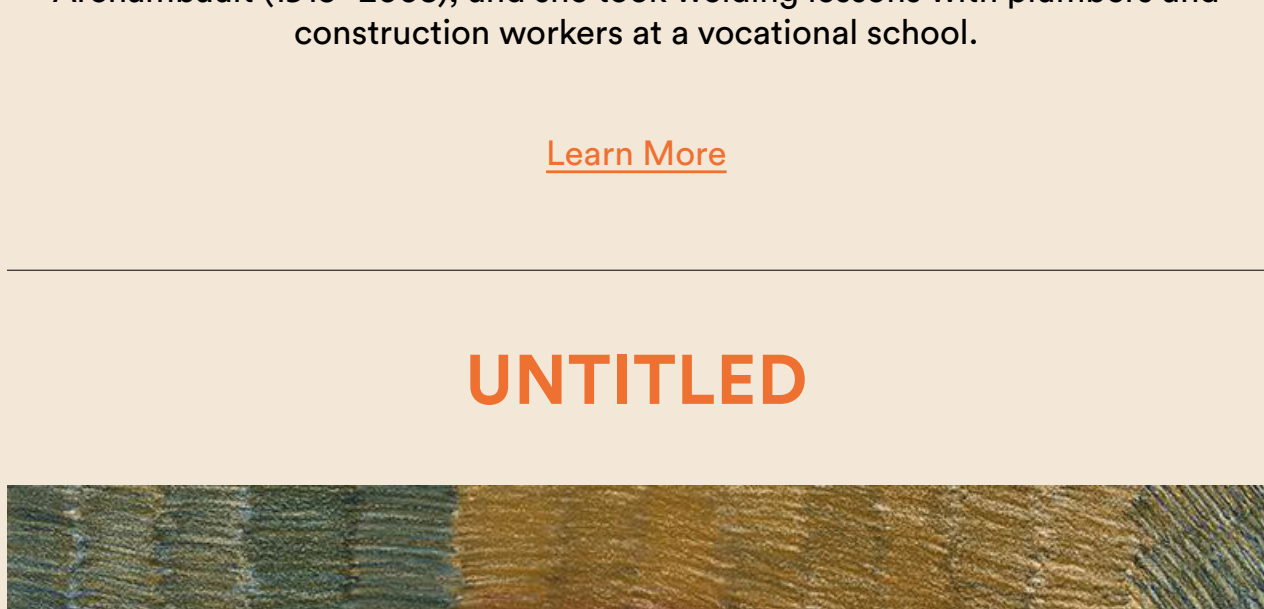


Françoise Sullivan, *Reds*, 2009–10, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
© Françoise Sullivan / CARCC 2023.

Sullivan returned to painting in the 1970s, at a time when many critics were saying the medium was dead. By the 1990s, she was focusing on the pure abstraction of monochrome, and she developed a sophisticated technique of colour and brushstroke to create energetic, pulsating works with high dramatic effect. This particular piece is from a series exploring the colour red and the many depths and resonances it contains. [As Annie Gérin notes](#), Sullivan's abstract paintings "always retain the movement and the sensuality that characterize [her] dance, performance, and sculpted works. They are also mainly improvised, or rather crafted, as though in a dialogue between the artist and her canvas."

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HOUSE FOR TRIANGLES

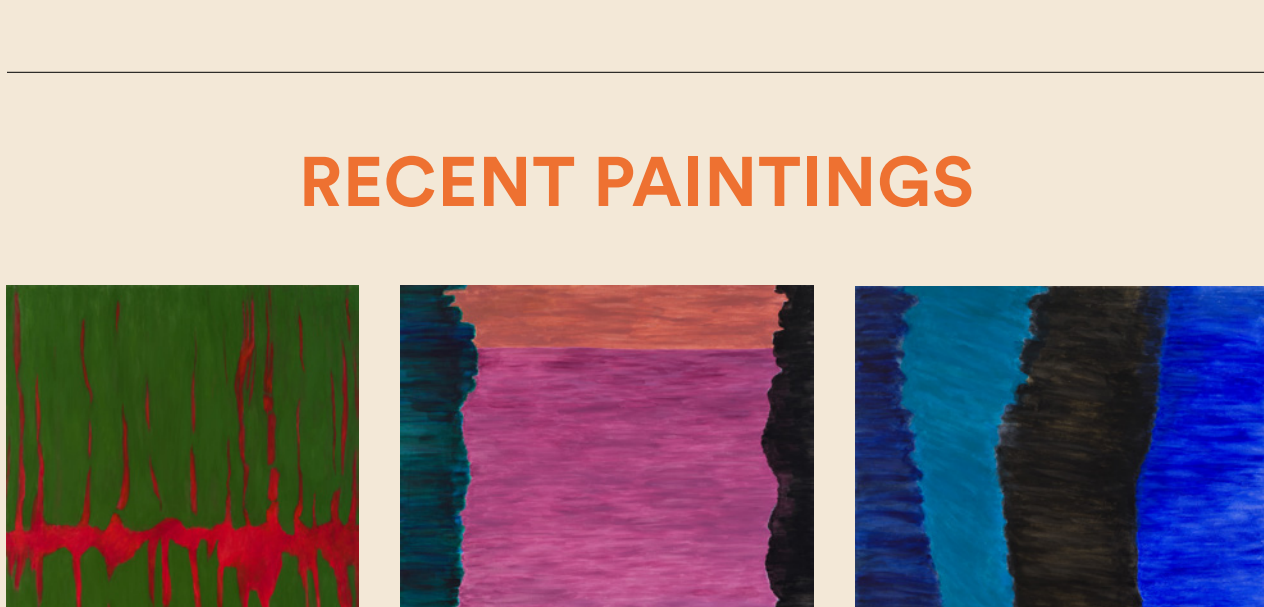


Françoise Sullivan, *House for Triangles*, 1960, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
© Françoise Sullivan / CARCC 2023.

This work of folded, welded metal arranged in a geometric stack is emblematic of Sullivan's early forays into sculpture. It is also a perfect example of her fearless, experimental approach to artmaking. She first became interested in the medium during her marriage to Ewen, when she went in search of a discipline that wouldn't encroach on his specialty. In 1959, she set up a studio in the family's unheated garage and began manipulating metal and clay. Sullivan honed her skills further by approaching the craft in two very different ways: she enrolled in a sculpture course at the École des beaux-arts with Quebec Surrealist Louis Archambault (1915–2003), and she took welding lessons with plumbers and construction workers at a vocational school.

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UNTITLED

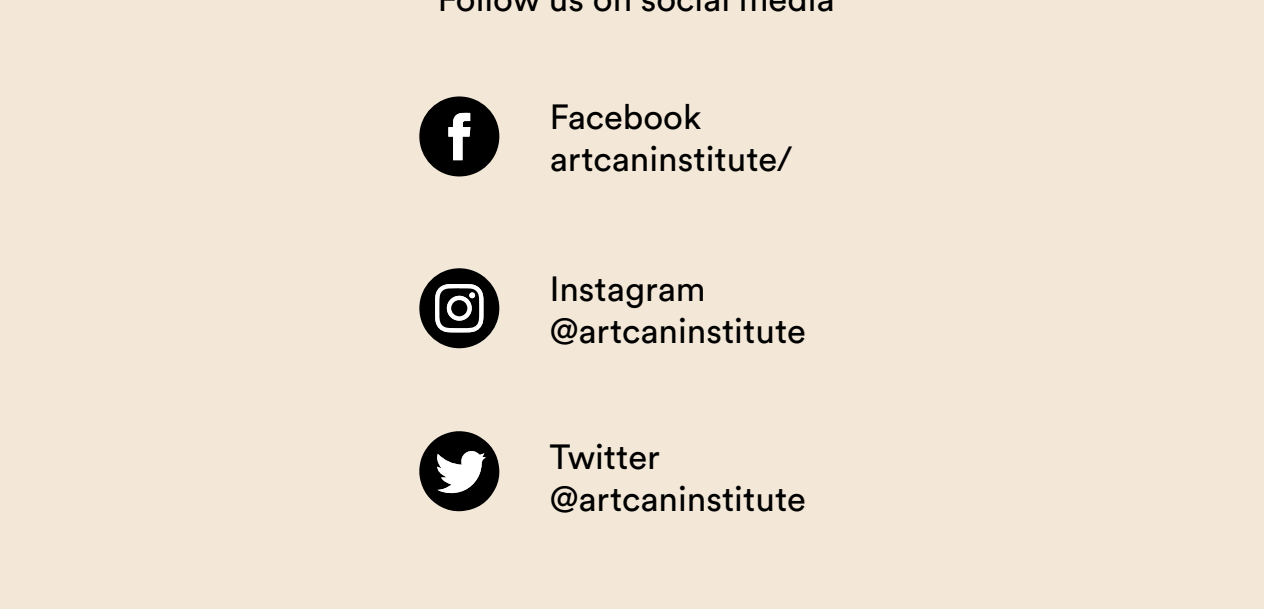


Françoise Sullivan, *Untitled*, 1999, collection of the artist. © Françoise Sullivan / CARCC 2023.

A red circle with a white centre seems to spin frenetically against a background of etched lines in this abstract work, completed in the late 1990s. The shape appears often in Sullivan's oeuvre, [notes Annie Gérin](#), "from the spiralling movement of her body in the dances she choreographed to the accumulations of stones she created in the 1970s and the circular paintings of the 1980s." It is also present in her large-scale welded metal sculptures, such as [Callooh Calloy](#), 1967, now installed at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan. Spontaneous and improvisational while always remaining confidently in control, Sullivan infuses her work with an undeniable primal energy that implicates the body in motion in its creation.

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RECENT PAINTINGS



Left: Françoise Sullivan, *Annunciator of the Moons*, 2022, collection of the artist. © Françoise Sullivan / CARCC 2023. Centre: Françoise Sullivan, *Your Lightning Dazzles Me*, 2023, collection of the artist. © Françoise Sullivan / CARCC 2023. Right: Françoise Sullivan, *We Sensed the Succession of the Ages*, 2023, collection of the artist. © Françoise Sullivan / CARCC 2023.

These three paintings were all created in 2022 and 2023, and are included in this fall's exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts marking the artist's one hundredth birthday. They are formally inspired by her workshop on the shores of the Red River in the Laurentians, north of Montreal. *Annunciator of the Moons*, 2022 (above left), is cut across with a red line that bleeds out in either direction, recalling a heartbeat on a monitor or perhaps spindly vegetation reflected in a lake. *Your Lightning Dazzles Me*, 2023 (above centre), shows the artist's masterful handling of colour with undulating bands of indigo, apricot, fuchsia, and gold, and *We Sensed the Succession of the Ages*, 2023 (above right), lines up four vertical stripes of blues varying from midnight to azure to lapis lazuli.

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