

# THIRTY-SIX FIRE STATIONS



ABOVE A PHOTOGRAPHIC GRID REPRESENTS YANN SÉRANDOUR'S EFFORTS IN CAPTURING EVERY OSTENSIBLY OPERATIONAL FIRE STATION IN MONTREAL AS OF DECEMBER 2001. THREE BLANK SPACES INDICATE THOSE THAT WERE NON-EXISTENT OR IN RUINS.

INSPIRED BY EDWARD RUSCHA, FRENCH ARTIST YANN SÉRANDOUR CONTRIBUTES TO MONTREAL'S ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY BY DOCUMENTING ITS EXISTING FIRE STATIONS.

TEXT SOPHIE GIRONNAY

Just like artist Edward Ruscha in his time, Yann Sérandour does not claim to be a photographer or an architecture scholar. The 33-year-old French artist follows a more conceptual path. Often hilarious, yet always precise, this path has led him to such facetious tours de force as serving

crème brûlée in ashtrays or mixing Man Ray's and Duchamp's pieces to create one single Dadaist Violin/Fountain.

This up-and-coming artist from Rennes in France's Bretagne region has exhibited his work in a dozen venues across Europe this year alone. And with a little help from collage and graphic design, Sérandour has turned recent art emblems and bibliomania into his daily favourite working tools.

So what made him create a recent photo-documentary on 36 Montreal fire stations? Is this exhibition a story about what happens when a conceptual French artist meets Quebec's built

heritage—on an artistic journey to Los Angeles and Ruscha?

Between 1963 and 1978, California artist Edward Ruscha produced 16 books of photography that inaugurated a new artistic genre—the artist's book—while inventing a new way of reading the urban landscape through random inventories of ordinary street elements. Fascinating for the emptiness of the spaces they represented, these fake indices were also full of blank pages. "Reinforcing the feeling of vacuity and drowsiness, the white pages that punctuate these books offer so many projection screens for the reader," says Sérandour.

In 2004, Sérandour published *Thirty-Six Fire Stations*, an explosive juxtaposition of the two first titles of Ruscha's books: *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1962) and *Various Small Fires and Milk* (1964). For his book, Sérandour gathers a series of snapshots, taken on a single December day in 2001 of every fire station that was operational in Montreal (according to a list obtained two years before from the City of Montreal).

But the random and missing tend to crop up. For instance, on that day, Fire Hall No. 20 at 181 rue Saint-Antoine Ouest was found in ruins, save for the façade which was awaiting reintegration into the Palais des congrès expansion. Three pages in the book were thus printed white, to be replaced by postcard inserts at a later date.

On the whole, this somewhat haphazard Ruschaesque project took seven years and several transatlantic travels to be completed. The most amusing incident (among many) was to see a starry-eyed, all-smiles Sérandour enter into Galerie MONOPOLI to discover that the elusive 1908 Fire Hall No. 20 had been recycled into—what else? An exhibition centre on architecture!

Some signs can't be ignored. It was at once decided that Sérandour's research on fire stations would become our Summer 2007 show, marking the second anniversary of our existence behind the façade of Fire Hall No. 20—the very first fire station the City of Montreal commissioned from an architect, Louis-Roch de Montbriand. **CA**

*Sophie Gironnay is the founder and director of Galerie MONOPOLI (www.galeriemonopoli.com), an artists' centre devoted to architecture. MONOPOLI's very first public event took place at the Belgo Building on rue Ste-Catherine—the very same December day that Yann Sérandour was photographing fire stations on Montreal's snowy streets.*

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## Pleins feux sur les casernes de Montréal

lundi 02 juillet 2007  
 Tag(s) exposition



Pour marquer ses deux années de présence dans le local de la rue Saint-Antoine, derrière la façade patrimoniale de l'ex-caserne No 20, la [galerie d'architecture Monopoli](#) organise une exposition de l'artiste français [Yann Sérandour](#): "36 Fire Stations".

Il s'agit d'une réponse franco-montréalaise - avec 40 ans de distance - aux lectures conceptuelles de l'urbanisme nées dans les années 60 à Los Angeles, dans des livres comme "26 Gasoline Stations" ou "34 Parking Lots in Los Angeles" d'[Edward Ruscha](#).

Reprenant à son compte l'archivage frontal en noir et blanc des bâtiments, Yann Sérandour a photographié l'ensemble des 36 casernes de pompiers en activité à Montréal. Toute l'histoire de la culture architecturale québécoise, depuis la tourelle de pierres écossaises jusqu'à l'entrepôt de banlieue, se reconnaît dans ces façades.

Joëlle St-Laurent, stagiaire finissante du DESS en design d'environnement de l'Uqam, a saisi cette occasion pour rassembler une importante documentation sur les casernes, leur histoire sociale et architecturale. À partir du matériel ainsi mis à leur disposition, les visiteurs seront invités à composer eux-mêmes leur "livre d'artiste" personnel, en agrafant leur choix de fiches archivistiques.

Le livre d'artiste publiée par Yann Sérandour ainsi qu'une édition de trois cartes postales seront en vente à Monopoli.

Galerie Monopoli  
 191 Saint-Antoine  
 (514) 868-6691

Du 4 juillet au 4 septembre  
 Du mercredi au vendredi, de 13h à 18h  
 Samedi, de 13h à 17h  
 Vernissage, mercredi 4 juillet, à 18h

par L'équipe de rédaction, *Créativité Montréal*

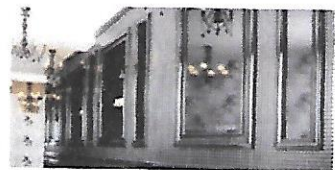
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