



Photo Sylvain Foster

## BERNARD VOYER, o.c., c.q., EXPLORER AND MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

For the past thirty years, Bernard Voyer has roamed the world in search of new challenges, expeditions and adventures, to bear first-hand witness to the beauty and fragility of the Earth. He has many feats to his credit: he travelled to the North Pole in 1994, the South Pole in 1996, and reached the top of Mount Everest (8,850 metres) in 1999. On December 10, 2001, Voyer completed his "world tour," having climbed to the highest summit of each of the seven continents.

■ What do you remember about your very first visit to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts?

B. V. I came to the Museum relatively late in life. I was born and brought up in Rimouski, and then I went to live in France for ten years. Nevertheless, I vividly remember an exhibition that, to my mind, perfectly expressed the Museum's open-minded approach. It was 1987 and you were presenting *Leonardo da Vinci, Engineer and Architect*. This was a landmark show from several points of view, two of which stand out in my mind. First, it was an event that invited visitors to venture outside the realm of the fine arts in the strict sense of the term. (The Museum has continued to pay attention to many different expressions of art.) Second, instead of using the exhibition's pièce de résistance to tempt people to come in and see it, the famous model of Leonardo's flying machine was suspended from the façade of the building (of the current Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion), visible not only to visitors but also to everyone passing by on Sherbrooke Street. It was a decision that chimed with the notions of genius, madness and adventure implicit in the design of this machine. It is for these unusual and big-hearted gestures that

I love Montreal, and my affection for the Museum is thereby regularly reinforced.

■ Have you a favourite work you would like to take home with you?

B. V. It would certainly be a Riopelle. I find his white period particularly moving. I can't give you an exact title, but I don't believe that's the most important thing. I have been tremendously inspired and excited by the power of this work, by the way it makes me experience nature.

■ When you visit, do you go all round the Museum or are you drawn to one gallery in particular?

B. V. The Museum is characterized by an open-minded approach, which is reflected in its policy of free admission at all times to its permanent collection. It thus offers us the freedom to choose whether or not to visit when we happen to be walking by. That is an important consideration in my relationship with art. The Museum is a place of memories of what it is to be human – an emotional place. In this respect, entering it is a commitment to oneself: it is the first step, essential to experiencing something within its walls. I can stay there for hours or just for a few minutes; I can look at a multitude of works, or decide that the one in front of which I have paused satisfies me while raising questions, so that I can leave with the definite feeling of having benefited from the experience. I'm interested in art in all its forms, and I enter the Museum not knowing beforehand which way I will go.

■ If the Museum asked you to add a work to the collection, which artist's work would you choose?

B. V. I would choose works of Inuit art and I would display them prominently. This may seem like a self-serving gesture, but it's not. Inuit imagery is part of our landscape, of our cultural identity. We should not hesitate to display what represents us and defines us. I would choose to show a reflection of what we are – the people around this Museum, all across Canada and here in Montreal. The 2008 exhibition *All for Art! Our Great Private Collectors Share Their Works* was a perfect example of this approach.

■ In your own creations, do some artists inspire you more than others?

B. V. The works of the British environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy evoke something elemental in me. His oeuvre is an example of Land Art, but I could cite the works of many others. The important thing is that nature should be the mainspring of an artist's practice, as it has been in my life. It is at the heart of my desire to restore to winter its beauty, its *raison d'être*.

### IN CONVERSATION WITH DANIELLE ROBERGE

Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923-2002)  
*Midnight Sun (Quartet in White)*  
1977  
Oil on canvas  
97 x 146 cm (each element)  
MMFA, purchase, with a special grant from the Government of Quebec  
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