

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The Vancouver Art Gallery Presents *Riopelle: Crossroads in Time*,
Celebrating One of the Most Influential Canadian Artists of the 20th Century**

This major retrospective showcases 50 years of Riopelle's acclaimed works alongside rarely seen creations



March 20, 2025, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliiwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is proud to present the largest and most comprehensive exhibition of works by **Jean Paul Riopelle** (1923–2002) in Vancouver's history. A towering figure in Canadian art, Riopelle remains one of the nation's most significant artists of the twentieth century. Organized by the National Gallery of Canada to mark the centenary celebration of the artist's birth, *Riopelle: Crossroads in Time* brings together almost 100 works drawn from 20 Canadian and international private and public collections, including two paintings from the Vancouver Art Gallery's permanent collection. Guest curated by art historian and independent researcher **Dr. Sylvie Lacerte**, this extensive exhibition offers an original take on Riopelle's creative output, highlighting his commitment to freedom of expression, his experimental ways of working, and his visionary and innovative approach.

Riopelle: Crossroads in Time is part of the Jean Paul Riopelle Centenary celebrations — a global initiative of the Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation that honours the boundless creative spirit and enduring legacy of one of Canada's most iconic artists.

The celebrations were initiated in 2019 by renowned philanthropist and collector **Michael Audain**, Chair of the Audain Foundation, and past Chair and Cofounder of the Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation: “I consider Jean Paul Riopelle to be one of the greatest Canadian artists of all time. Over the past five years, the Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation curated an exceptional program to mark the centenary of his birth. Never before has one of our national artists been celebrated this way. We consider this to be our collective duty of memory. And we hope it will inspire others, so we may see our cultural heroes duly acknowledged for their contribution to the history of Canadian and international art. I am grateful to both the National Gallery of Canada and to the Vancouver Art Gallery for bringing this exhibition to British Columbia.”

Anthony Kiendl, CEO & Executive Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, reflects on the significance of this presentation and the support that made it possible to bring the exhibition to the West Coast of Canada: “We feel privileged to present *Riopelle: Crossroads in Time* at the Vancouver Art Gallery as the grande finale of the artist’s centenary celebrations. We are grateful to our presenting sponsor, The Audain Foundation, who made it possible to give Vancouver audiences this incredible opportunity to experience Riopelle’s remarkable work and the new perspectives that the exhibition offers.”

Spanning five decades of Riopelle’s creative journey—bringing together paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints and collages—*Riopelle: Crossroads in Time* recognizes the breadth of Riopelle’s imagination and the diversity of his work and interests. The exhibition is organized chronologically to highlight his far-ranging practice and explosive periods of creativity, from the popular works of his youth, such as *Le perroquet vert* [The Green Parrot] (1949), to his final works, including *Sans titre (Autour de Rosa)* [Untitled (Around Rosa)] (1992). Early works from the 1940s mark the development of a spontaneous painting style inspired by his brief time as part of Les Automatistes, an influential group of Québécois artists. By the 1950s, when Riopelle’s work was being shown all over the world, he had arrived at what became his signature “mosaic” style in which he manipulated the paint with a palette knife to create bold shapes and energetic compositions. The exhibition spotlights several stunning canvases from this defining period, including *La Roue II* [The Wheel II] (1956) and *Chicago II* (1958).

In the 1960s Riopelle moved fluidly between sculpture and painting, and the exhibition features several bronze sculptures from this period, as well as paintings and prints created in the 1970s that were inspired by the imagery and atmosphere of the Far North. His final work from the 1980s and 1990s represents a surprising turn with colourful panel paintings peppered with spray paint and glitter. The exhibition will also unravel Riopelle’s creative and cultural connections through the inclusion of a selection of works by his contemporaries, including **Sam Francis, Alberto Giacometti, Roseline Granet, Joan Mitchell** and **Françoise Sullivan**, which draw out influences and exchanges that shaped the artist’s life and work over time.

This exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Canada as part of the Jean Paul Riopelle Centenary celebrations. The Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation, co-founded in 2019 by Canadian philanthropist **Michael Audain** and **Yseult Riopelle**, the artist’s daughter, orchestrated a vast program to mark the centenary, leading to national and international celebrations and to the acknowledgment of Jean Paul Riopelle as a Canadian cultural icon. For decades Riopelle’s experimental works have inspired generations of artists in Canada and around the world.

Jean-François Bélisle, Director and CEO, National Gallery of Canada, reflects on the celebrations: "We were honoured to present *Riopelle: Crossroads in Time* on the occasion of the centennial year of Jean Paul Riopelle's birth. From one of our best-attended openings of 2023 to innovative music and dance events, this major retrospective of works by this legendary Canadian artist was a huge success. I would like to underscore the importance of partnerships between our country's museum institutions to make Canadian art accessible to all Canadians, from coast to coast to coast. Following its opening in the National Capital Region, we were elated to see the show have an outstanding run at the Winnipeg Art Gallery last summer. I would now like to express my gratitude to the Vancouver Art Gallery for hosting the final stop of this exhibition."

Offering a unique take on Canada's famed artist, this visually spectacular exhibition presents Riopelle's renowned works alongside many which have been rarely shown in public. The presentation at the Vancouver Art Gallery will also feature works by Riopelle from the Gallery's permanent collection, including his bold composition *Sous le Mythe de Gitskan No. 3* [Under the Myth of Gitskan No. 3] (1956)—which has not been shown for more than a decade—and *Figure libre-Parure* [Free figure-Adornment] (1967). In preparation for the exhibition, *Figure libre-Parure* [Free figure-Adornment] has undergone extensive conservation treatment. Delicate consolidation, infilling and inpainting took place to resolve areas of unstable cracking and lifting paint. Now stabilized, preserved and newly framed, the painting is ready to be seen in its full brilliance.

"Jean Paul Riopelle was the first post-war Canadian artist to achieve international status. He is a pillar of our history, who has left in his wake a multifaceted body of work that encourages pushing past boundaries, and this is perhaps his greatest legacy," says **Dr. Sylvie Lacerte**, Art Historian and Independent Researcher.

"Underlining the extraordinary career of this prodigious artist enables us to keep the memory of his accomplishments alive. Riopelle was first and foremost a trailblazer, and that is precisely what made him an eminently contemporary artist. He was invested in the present moment; situating him at a crossroads in time highlights the currency of a body of work that will always be in the here and now."

Riopelle: Crossroads in Time will be on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery from March 21 to September 1, 2025. The exhibition is curated by **Dr. Sylvie Lacerte**, Art Historian and Independent Researcher. The Vancouver Art Gallery presentation is coordinated by **Siobhan McCracken Nixon**, Associate Curator. To coincide with the opening of the exhibition, and the final stop on the exhibition's tour, join **Dr. Sylvie Lacerte** in conversation with **Dr. Richard Hill**, the Smith Jarislowsky Senior Curator of Canadian Art at the Vancouver Art Gallery, on March 22, 2025, at 2PM.

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue, available for purchase in the Gallery Store. This thoughtfully designed hardcover publication, edited by **Sylvie Lacerte**, includes essays by artists and art historians, including **Gilles Daigneault**, **Vera Frenkel**, **Manuel Mathieu**, **Caroline Monnet**, **Marc-Antoine K. Phaneuf** and **Marc Séguin**, who reflect on Riopelle's legacy.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/exhibitions/riopelle-crossroads-in-time>

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Image: Jean Paul Riopelle, *Figure libre–parure* [Adornment-Free Figure], 1967, oil on canvas, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift from the Estate of Eric Sonner, VAG 2010.2.2, © 2025 Estate of Jean Paul Riopelle/Visual Arts-CARCC, Ottawa, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jean Paul Riopelle (1923–2002) was one of the greatest Canadian artists of the 20th century and among the few to achieve international recognition. A student of Paul-Émile Borduas at the École du meuble de Montréal, he briefly joined the Automatiste movement and co-signed the *Refus global* manifesto in 1948. By then, he was settled in France, where he lived and worked for 40 years, building a reputation that earned his works space on the walls of major museums. Riopelle received numerous awards, including the Prix Paul-Émile-Borduas in 1981, and his works are included in public and private collections around the world, including the Vancouver Art Gallery. He has left a huge and brilliant body of work that transcends time and has inspired generations of artists.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

Founded in 1880, the National Gallery of Canada is among the world's most respected art institutions. As a national museum, The National Gallery of Canada exists to serve all Canadians, no matter where they live. The Gallery does this by sharing the collection, exhibitions and public programming widely. The Gallery creates dynamic experiences that allow for new ways of seeing ourselves and each other through the visual arts, while centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The National Gallery of Canada's mandate is to develop, preserve and present a collection for the learning and enjoyment of all – now and for generations to come. The Gallery is home to more than 90,000 works including one of the finest collections of Indigenous and Canadian art, major works from the fourteenth to the twenty-first century and extensive library and archival holdings.

ABOUT THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's ground-breaking exhibitions, extensive public programs and emphasis on advancing scholarship all focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to those of the Asia Pacific region. The Gallery's exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture. The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is situated on the ancestral and unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəy^əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and is respectful of the Indigenous stewards of the land it occupies, whose rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Vancouver and the work of the Gallery.