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Beat

Kind Of Kaleidoscopic

Montreal Exhibit Shows Miles Davis' Influence As Visual Artist

Miles Davis, the musician, is a legend. Miles Davis, the painter, is still making his mark, with a little help from a visual-art exhibit in Montreal.

"We Want Miles: Miles Davis vs. Jazz," a multimedia retrospective currently on display at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, explores Davis' re-workings of the sound and language of jazz, offers insights into his world and demonstrates his impact on music and visual art. Designed and organized by the Cité De La Musique in Paris, with the support of Miles Davis Properties, the exhibition had a successful run in Paris last winter, testifying to Davis' enduring ability to captivate the imagination. It will be showing in Montreal through Aug. 29.

Davis had a special relationship with Paris for more than 40 years. At 22 he travelled there for the first time to play the 1949 jazz festival and was moved by the warm reception he received. In Paris he met Pablo Picasso, Jean-Paul Sartre, Boris Vian and Juliette Gréco.

But Montreal was also significant for Davis. MMFA Director Nathalie Bondil notes in the exhibition's catalog that Davis played the Montreal Jazz Festival several times (his 1985 concert at the Théâtre Saint-Denis is screened at the exhibition). He performed at various Montreal venues in the '60s and '70s prior to the festival's inception.

"The connection between Paris and Montreal was natural," explained André Ménard, co-founder and artistic director of the Montreal Jazz Festival, one of the exhibit's 14 partners. "The exhibition has a strong French element; *Ascenseur Pour L'Echafaud (Lift To The Scaffold)*, for example, is a big Miles Davis opus."

Eight chronological and thematic sections—from Davis' childhood to his last concert at La Villette in Paris in 1991—trace the various stages of Davis' artistry, "like you would for a painter," explained curator Vincent Bessières. Davis' fa-



ther had encouraged him to draw from a young age; it "took the edge off things," Davis told writer/photographer Ken Franckling in 1986. "It takes a lot of anger out. If you're gonna get mad, and you sit down and sketch a bit, it will leave."

The exhibit showcases a number of Davis' original paintings and sketches. His influence on other visual artists is evidenced in paintings and sculptures by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Niki de Saint Phalle and Mati Klarwein. Also on display are archival materials and objects—some of which were discovered by Bessières as he sifted through boxes of Davis' estate—including rare concert footage, original scores, several of Davis' trumpets and band members' instruments, stage outfits, vintage pressings of records and revealing portraits. Among the 350-plus items, several unique to the Montreal installation, is a 4-minute video of Davis

boxing, illustrating a lesser-known aspect of his complex persona. Mute-shaped listening rooms placed throughout the installation constitute one of the exhibition's main features, facilitating a direct encounter with Davis' seminal works.

Marcus Miller, producer and co-composer of Davis' 1986 album *Tutu*, played at Montreal's L'Astral with his *Tutu Revisited* project on the eve of the exhibition's opening.

"I was asked to play music from *Tutu* to close the exhibition in Paris, and hesitated because Miles would never go back," Miller said. "So I decided to get a bunch of young players and see what they could bring, thinking, 'Miles would like that.'"

"It's overwhelming to see this exhibit again," mused Erin Davis, Davis' son, addressing the media at the opening. "Miles would have wanted this to be done right." —Sharonne Cohen