



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.

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Thirty-Six Fire Stations

Inspired by Edward Ruscha, French Artist Yann Sérandour Contributes to Montreal's Architectural History by Documenting Its Existing Fire Stations.

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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 photodocumentary 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.

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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