

Impact Assessment Phyllis Lambert Grant (2008-2017)

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Executive Summary

Purpose and Methodology

This report presents a qualitative impact assessment of the Phyllis Lambert Grant, examining its effects on the career trajectories of grant recipients, and broader benefits to the City of Montréal. The assessment is based on in-depth interviews with all grant recipients, a comparison group of unsuccessful applicants, and key stakeholders involved in the programme (grant organizers and a jury member). Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated with AI assistance and human oversight. Given the small population of awardees, the methodology prioritizes depth and comparative insight over statistical generalization; findings therefore reflect perceived and observed impacts while acknowledging the limits inherent in self-reporting and counterfactual analysis.

Overview of the Grant

Established to commemorate the 80th birthday of Phyllis Lambert, a revered figure in the Montréal design and architecture communities, the grant was an initiative of the Bureau du design – a department within the City of Montréal – who administered the grant between 2008 and 2017. Conceived to benefit the Montréal design community more widely, the grant was awarded to early-to-mid career designers and architects (under ten years of practice). Awarded through an open, juried competition, the grant provided \$10,000 to support a professional development project, conditional only on cooperation within UNESCO Cities Network.

Key Impacts on Designers and Studios

Across all recipients—and supported by comparative insights from non-winning applicants—the Phyllis Lambert Grant generated durable impacts disproportionate to its modest financial value.

The most consistent effect was professional legitimacy and confidence. The grant validated designers at pivotal moments of transition, often shaping long-term career trajectories. The prestige and rigour of the

award conferred credibility that recipients continued to leverage years later in competitions, commissions, teaching roles, and international work.

The grant functioned as a career accelerator, increasing visibility, strengthening professional networks, and supporting studio consolidation. It legitimized experimental and interdisciplinary practices and enabled designers to take strategic risks earlier in their careers. Crucially, the grant supported design research, an area largely underserved by existing funding mechanisms. Time and resources dedicated to travel, observation, and reflection led to lasting methodological and philosophical development that continues to inform recipients' work, business models, and methodology.

Key Impacts on the City and Public Interest

At the ecosystem level, the Phyllis Lambert Grant delivered clear public value. It strengthened Montréal's role as a UNESCO City of Design, translating a symbolic designation into tangible cultural leadership. Recipients acted as international ambassadors, reinforcing Montréal's design reputation through global exchanges, exhibitions, lectures, and collaborations.

The programme contributed to talent retention, encouraging internationally-trained designers to build and sustain practices in Montréal. It also created a curated cohort of design leaders who later contributed to public projects, cultural institutions, juries, and advisory roles, often applying research-driven approaches that improved the quality and relevance of public work.

Conclusion

This impact assessment demonstrates that the Phyllis Lambert Grant was a high-leverage public investment. With limited financial outlay, it generated long-term benefits for individual careers, studio growth and internationalization, as well as Montréal's international reputation, the reinforcement of its design ecosystem and built heritage.

Résumé Exécutif

Objet et méthodologie

Le présent rapport propose une évaluation qualitative des impacts de la Bourse Phyllis Lambert, en examinant ses effets sur les trajectoires professionnelles des lauréats ainsi que ses retombées plus larges pour la Ville de Montréal. L'évaluation repose sur des entretiens approfondis menés auprès de l'ensemble des lauréats de la bourse, d'un groupe de comparaison composé de candidats non retenus, ainsi que de parties prenantes clés du programme (organismes de la bourse et un membre du jury). Les entretiens ont été enregistrés, transcrits et traduits à l'aide d'outils d'IA, avec supervision humaine. Compte tenu du nombre restreint de lauréats, la méthodologie privilégie l'analyse en profondeur et la comparaison qualitative plutôt que la généralisation statistique. Les constats présentés reflètent donc des impacts perçus et observés, tout en reconnaissant les limites inhérentes à l'auto-déclaration et à l'analyse contrefactuelle.

Présentation de la bourse

Créée à l'occasion du 80^e anniversaire de Phyllis Lambert, figure emblématique des milieux du design et de l'architecture à Montréal, la bourse est une initiative du Bureau du design – un service de la Ville de Montréal – qui l'a administrée de 2008 à 2017. Conçue pour bénéficier plus largement à la communauté du design montréalaise, la bourse s'adressait à des designers et architectes en début ou en milieu de carrière (moins de dix ans de pratique). Attribuée dans le cadre d'un concours public avec jury, elle offrait un soutien financier de 10 000 \$ pour la réalisation d'un projet de développement professionnel, sous la seule condition d'une collaboration au sein du Réseau des Villes créatives de l'UNESCO.

Principaux impacts sur les designers et les studios

Chez l'ensemble des lauréats – et confirmés par les témoignages des candidats non retenus – la Bourse Phyllis Lambert a généré des impacts durables, largement disproportionnés par rapport à sa valeur financière relativement modeste. L'effet le plus constant observé est celui de la légitimité professionnelle et de la confiance en soi. La bourse a validé des designers à des moments charnières de leur parcours, influençant souvent

leurs trajectoires à long terme. Le prestige et la rigueur du processus d'attribution ont conféré une crédibilité que les lauréats continuent de mobiliser des années plus tard, notamment dans le cadre de concours, de commandes, d'activités d'enseignement et de collaborations internationales.

La bourse a également agi comme un accélérateur de carrière, en augmentant la visibilité des lauréats, en renforçant leurs réseaux professionnels et en soutenant la consolidation de leurs studios. Elle a légitimé des pratiques expérimentales et interdisciplinaires et permis aux designers de prendre des risques stratégiques plus tôt dans leur carrière. De manière cruciale, la bourse a soutenu la recherche en design, un champ largement sous-financé par les mécanismes existants. Le temps et les ressources consacrés au voyage, à l'observation et à la réflexion ont conduit à des développements méthodologiques et philosophiques durables, qui continuent d'informer les pratiques, les modèles d'affaires et les approches des lauréats.

Principaux impacts pour la Ville et l'intérêt public

À l'échelle de l'écosystème, la Bourse Phyllis Lambert a généré une valeur publique tangible. Elle a contribué à renforcer le rôle de Montréal en tant que Ville créative de design de l'UNESCO, en traduisant une désignation symbolique en leadership culturel concret. Les lauréats ont agi comme des ambassadeurs internationaux, renforçant la réputation de Montréal par des échanges, expositions, conférences et collaborations à l'échelle mondiale. Le programme a également favorisé la rétention des talents, en encourageant des designers formés à l'international à établir et à maintenir leur pratique à Montréal. Il a permis de constituer un bassin ciblé de leaders du design qui, par la suite, ont contribué à des projets publics, à des institutions culturelles, à des jurys et à des rôles consultatifs, en y appliquant des approches fondées sur la recherche, améliorant ainsi la qualité et la pertinence des interventions publiques.

Conclusion

Cette évaluation d'impact démontre que la Bourse Phyllis Lambert a constitué un investissement public à fort effet de levier. Avec un apport financier limité, elle a généré des bénéfices durables tant pour les carrières individuelles que pour la croissance et l'internationalisation des studios, tout en renforçant la réputation internationale de Montréal, son écosystème du design et son patrimoine bâti.

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1. Introduction and Context

The Phyllis Lambert Grant was initiated on the occasion of the 80th birthday of Phyllis Lambert, an emblematic figure of Canadian architecture.

Design Montréal

The City of Montréal has had a Design Commissioner since 1991 following the publication of the Picard Report in 1986, which recognized **design as a strategic sector** for the City. The *Bureau du design* (also known as 'Design Montréal') was instituted in 2006 when Montréal was designated a UNESCO Creative City of Design, and covers all disciplines of design, ranging from urban planning and architecture to industrial, fashion, interiors, graphic and new design disciplines yet to be explored.¹ The *Bureau* reports to the City of Montréal's 'Service du développement économique' [Economic Development Service] a department that "guides and supports Montréal businesses as they grow".

In the last 30 years, the *Bureau* has implemented initiatives aimed at stimulating design and promoting the visibility of Montréal designers locally and internationally.

The *Bureau* works with designers and architects to support City departments and boroughs in experimenting with processes that promote **architectural and design quality**. Through competitions, workshops, panels and best practice papers, they support the City's design professionals, especially the next generation. The *Bureau* is responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Montréal Agenda for Quality and Exemplarity in Design and Architecture, a guidance document adopted in 2019 which establishes guiding principles for the built environment.

Historical Context: Phyllis Lambert

Phyllis Lambert came to international prominence when she commissioned Mies van der Rohe (and other architects) to design the Seagram Building in New York on behalf of her father's company, the Seagram Company. The building was completed in 1958.

Through the seventies, Lambert became very involved in preservation and urban development projects in Montréal. Through initiatives such as *Héritage Montréal*, the *Société d'Amélioration de Milton-Parc*, the

¹ <https://designmontreal.com/en/about-us>

Who is Phyllis Lambert?

Phyllis Lambert, architect, is Founding Director and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montréal, an international research centre and museum founded in 1979 on the conviction that architecture is a public concern. Phyllis Lambert first made architectural history as the Director of Planning of the Seagram Building (1954–58) in New York City.

With a parallel commitment to intervention in the urban fabric, Phyllis Lambert founded *Héritage Montréal* in 1975, and four years later was instrumental in establishing the *Société d'Amélioration de Milton-Parc*, the largest non-profit cooperative housing renovation project in Canada. From 1984 to 2007, she served on the Board of the *Vieux-Port de Montréal*, which is credited with the transformation of the city's historic area from industrial to societal use. In 1996, Lambert formed the *Fonds d'Investissement de Montréal* (FIM), the only private investment fund in Canada participating in the revitalization of housing in low- and medium-income neighbourhoods.

In addition to completing a B.A. (1948) at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, and an M.S. (1963) in Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, Phyllis Lambert holds honorary degrees from 27 universities in North America and in Europe. With major contributions to scholarship and architecture, as well as a tireless commitment to civic activism, Phyllis Lambert has been recognized with numerous awards and distinctions. She is a recipient of the Prix Gérard-Morisset; the World Monuments Fund's Hadrian Award; the Prix d'Excellence de l'Opération patrimoine architectural of Ville de Montréal and Héritage Montréal; the Preservation League of New York State's Pillar of New York Award; the Woodrow Wilson Award for Public Service; and the 2008 Jane Jacobs Lifetime Achievement Award of the Canadian Urban Institute, Toronto.

Phyllis Lambert has received the highest civil honours in Canada as a Companion of the Order of Canada and a Grand Officer of the Ordre national du Québec. She is a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and recipient of its Gold Medal, the nation's highest architectural award. France has appointed her Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie has named her a Chevalier of the Ordre de la Pléiade. Phyllis Lambert is also an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Description from the City of Montréal [website](#). For more, see recent *Le Devoir* article in Appendix.

Vieux Port de Montréal [Port Authority], she demonstrated how architectural thinking can actively intervene in housing, heritage preservation, and urban development.

In 1979, Lambert established the *Canadian Centre for Architecture* (CCA), a global hub for architectural research, discourse, and exhibition, affirming architecture as a **public concern rather than a purely professional or commercial one**. For designers and architects in the city, Lambert embodies a model of practice that integrates design excellence with social responsibility, research, and activism.

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network

According to UNESCO's website the Creatives Cities Network is a programme developed "to promote cooperation among cities which have recognized culture and creativity as strategic drivers of sustainable urban development." The cities are subdivided into their creative classification (of which there are eight total, ranging from literature, to film, craft and folk art, design and, recently, architecture). As of 2025, there are 408 cities designated, in over 100 countries, of which 53 are Design Cities.

In application, it is a loose network of cities that contribute and collaborate according to their own strategic objectives and capacities. The Network is maintained through a complex interplay of relationships between individuals, strategic investments from

members that can afford to contribute (staff time, meeting planning or hosting), good will and some degree of friendly co-petition.

The Phyllis Lambert Grant

In 2007, the *Canadian Centre for Architecture* (CCA), the institution founded by Lambert and based in Montréal, was looking for initiatives to mark the 80th birthday of their Founder. They approached several Montréal and international institutions, including the Ville de Montréal. The Mayor's office asked the *Bureau du design* to propose an initiative.

They accepted the mandate, but in addition to marking the exceptional contributions of Lambert to the design and architecture communities, the *Bureau du design* was determined that the programme would also serve to support Montréal designers. The idea for a grant was born. Responding to the needs of the local community, the grant leveraged Montréal's position within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, to combine a research trip, project funding and a promotional plan.

The inaugural Phyllis Lambert Grant was announced in 2008, through an open Call for Entries. Organized exclusively by Design Montréal, the grant was **awarded to nine designers or teams** between 2008 and 2017. The grant is described on the website of the *Bureau du design* as follows:

The Ville de Montréal, through its Bureau du design, awards every two years the

Phyllis Lambert Grant to an individual designer, architect, creative professional, or a collective, with fewer than 10 years' practice, and having demonstrated exceptional quality in studies and work as well as marked interest in city themes.

The grant, in the amount of \$10,000, must be used to carry out a professional development project that involves a design theme focusing on the city. The recipient(s) may undertake the project in one or more of the cities of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, of which Montréal has been a member, as a City of Design, since 2006.

Discontinuation

The grant was given on an annual basis until 2015, when it was determined it would become bi-annual. After the 2017 edition the grant was discontinued, due to administrative constraints within the changing City regulations.

Thus, the grant winners' experiences are being analyzed **between eight and seventeen years after the grant was received.**

External Factors

In the intervening years between the discontinuation of the grant in 2017, and

today, the pandemic was an important disruptor, changing the course of many of the studios.

Nicholas Sangaré, one of the two recipients of the most recent grant awarded, explained that between 2017 (the year they received the grant) and 2020 the studio had experienced steady growth. They went on to win several awards, built relationships with both local and international brands, and took on projects in Québec, Ontario, and New York. But when the pandemic hit, everything slowed dramatically. Some projects were paused; others were cancelled altogether. Since then, the two Principals have separated the business, which has now been scaled back to Sangaré working on his own.

This was not the only studio to experience this kind of a shift. Both *Dikini* within the group of winners and *Studio Feed* (within the control group of applicants) experienced a similar scaling-down during this period. Thus, to provide adequate context, it is necessary to consider the counter-effects of the global pandemic.

2. Structure and Implementation

The Phyllis Lambert Grant was managed and funded entirely by the *Bureau du design*. The intention was to make a marked difference by offering both professionalization, through a research and travel project, and profile through the recognition and promotional aspects.

Early on key decisions were made about how the grant would be structured. Who would be eligible, the composition of the jury, the selection process, the aims of the grant (and therefore the choice of grant prizes) and the desired outcomes for both Montréal and its citizenry, were all balanced to create a programme that would **honour Phyllis Lambert while giving both Montréal designers and Montréalers more widely, long-lasting returns.**

Eligibility Criteria

The grant was aimed at what in French is termed 'la relève' a designation that would be roughly translated as *the succession, or the generation being heralded in*. This is not the same as 'emerging', though it is often translated this way. The definition within the

contest criteria was that the applicants must be professionals "having ten years or less of professional practice". These were in fact **early-to-mid-career practitioners**. Apart from the final winners (2017), all the previous winners in fact had **seven years or more of work experience**.

Marie-Josée Lacroix, Montréal's first Design Commissioner and the *Bureau du design*'s Chief of Staff from 1991 to 2021, stated that this was intentional. "Funding opportunities existed for students, recent graduates, and established professionals, but almost nothing supported designers with roughly ten years or less of experience—precisely the moment when international exposure could be transformative." When it was created, the grant was engineered to accelerate the professional development of designers at a critical stage of their career — **the time where they would be establishing their own studios**. This aligned with Lambert's lifelong commitment to emerging talent. According to Lacroix, Lambert "had always championed young designers and remained deeply curious about new voices in the field."

The areas of design that were covered were all those that the *Bureau* had within their purview: this not only included any discipline that could be loosely termed as 'design' but also, architecture, landscape architecture

and urban planning. Though this was never explicitly stated –the grant was announced for ‘design professionals’ – it was expressed within the selection of the jury, the selection criteria and, eventually, the winners.

Aims and Project Parameters

The type of project that could be submitted was left intentionally “extremely open and exploratory”, according to Lacroix. Recipients could conduct research abroad, take inspiration trips, attend design fairs, or even pursue short internships in international firms. “The key,” according to Lacroix, “was that the project should stimulate growth, exploration, and international exposure.”

However, one of the evaluation criteria for the grant was the applicant’s potential to generate **not only personal benefits but also collective impact**. Giving the example of *Pelletier De Fontenay* (who were working on the Montréal Insectarium), Lacroix explained that they “looked at how contacts could be shared or if know-how would contribute to the city.”

Call for Entries

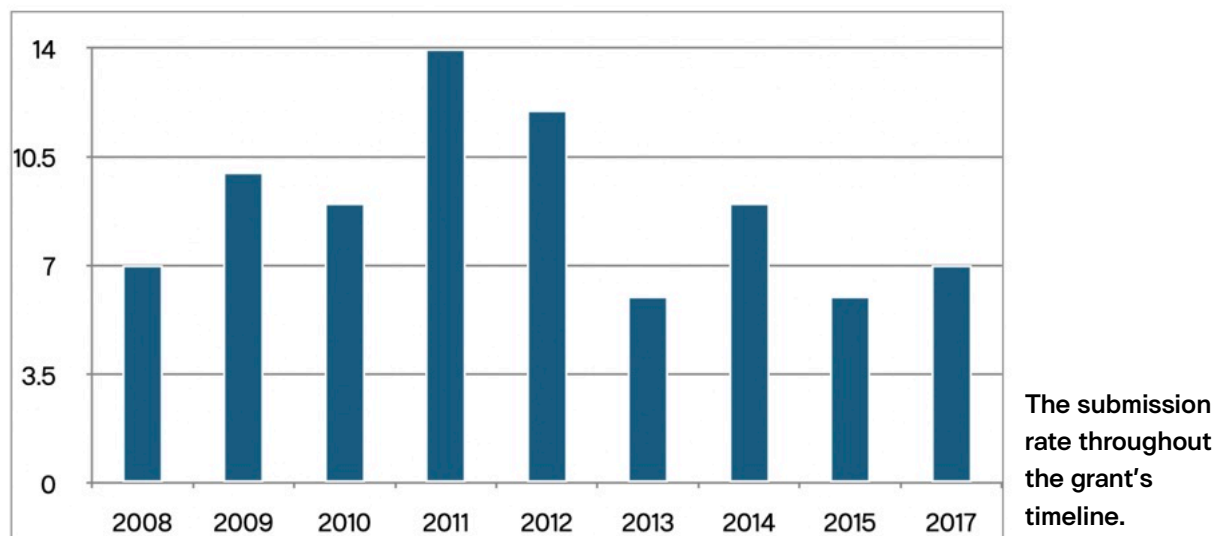
An open Call was announced by the City and the *Bureau* made efforts to ensure that their community shared the information, connecting directly with schools, potential candidates, associations, and organizations that could amplify the reach of the announcement. Regardless of these efforts, the winners seemed to be connected among

themselves. Lacroix noted that this was “to be expected,” as they were part of the same generational cohort, often connected through school, collaborations, and shared professional circles.

Recommendations between them circulated informally; recipients often encouraged their friends and colleagues to apply. Lacroix felt that “this was neither surprising nor problematic—simply reflective of the scale and interconnectedness of Montréal’s design community.”

Submission process

The applicants to the grant were asked to submit a written plan, outlining their project, the UNESCO Creative Network city (or cities) that they would visit, and outcomes. For many, this was a laborious process. In fact, representatives within the *Bureau* who managed the applications and also were responsible for outreach and answering applicant questions, found that the demands of the written request – candidates could spend weeks developing and refining their applications – were one of the greatest barriers to larger numbers of applications. There was a question at one point to review this requirement and it ultimately held because, as Lacroix explained, “it was a merit prize after all,” it was expected that these laureates, who would represent the best of Montréal, could express their ideas clearly.



Jury Composition

In order to be in a position to judge applications from a wide variety of design backgrounds, and also balance the unwritten standards of Lambert herself, the jury composition was carefully selected. On average, the **juries were composed of five individuals**. Invariably one representative of the CCA and one representative of the City would sit alongside a carefully selected complementary group of recognized professionals. Where possible, broad expertise (for instance, a representative of the Museum of Fine Arts) was favoured. Professionals with overlapping areas of design expertise were also chosen.

Applications

An average of 8.8 applications were submitted per year. The number of applications increased in the first few years, reaching a maximum of 14 submissions in

2011. This was identified by representatives of the *Bureau* as being a natural consequence of the Grant becoming established and better-known within the community. In later years, the numbers dwindled, with minimums of six applications in both 2013 and 2015 (it was subsequent to 2015 that it was decided that the Grant would take place only every other year). This would seem to indicate that the pool of eligible designers of that quality level was starting to get a little thin within Montréal.

The winners of the last grant in 2017 were widely considered to come from an entirely different generation than the first cohort; they were significantly younger, having graduated from their bachelors degrees between six and fourteen years later than the previous winners. They also had less work experience than their predecessors with an average of four years rather than eight.

Jury Deliberations

Deliberation occurred in two phases. The applications received would be reviewed by the programmes manager within the *Bureau du design* (Stéphanie Jecrois, for all but the two final years), to ensure that they fulfilled all the **eligibility and application criteria**.

The Jury Members were then handed the dossiers of all the eligible applications and given two weeks to review, and research as needed. This stage was, by all accounts, taken very seriously by the Jury. They would arrive to the in-person deliberation with

carefully prepared dossiers on all the applicants. All decisions were determined by consensus. As described by a former jury member, Louis-Charles Lasnier, each member of the Jury would present reviews of each of the dossiers, and select their top choices. At the end of the roundtable, the top choices would be further debated and deliberation would only conclude when a consensus was reached.

Project Support: International

The winners were given support for their projects through a variety of sources. The

How much did it cost?

The costs of the grant were two-fold: the amounts contributed by the City as a project budget (**external funds** invested) and the amounts contributed by the *Bureau* from their operational budget (the **human resource costs associated with managing the grant**).

External costs:

- \$10K of grant money given to the winners to cover the costs of their research/ travel projects
- \$5K invested in promotion of the designers including press releases and videos produced
- \$ 2.5K of variable costs

This calculation comes from the Minutes of a 2013 City of Montréal Executive Committee meeting that approves the overall budget at \$17.5 K.

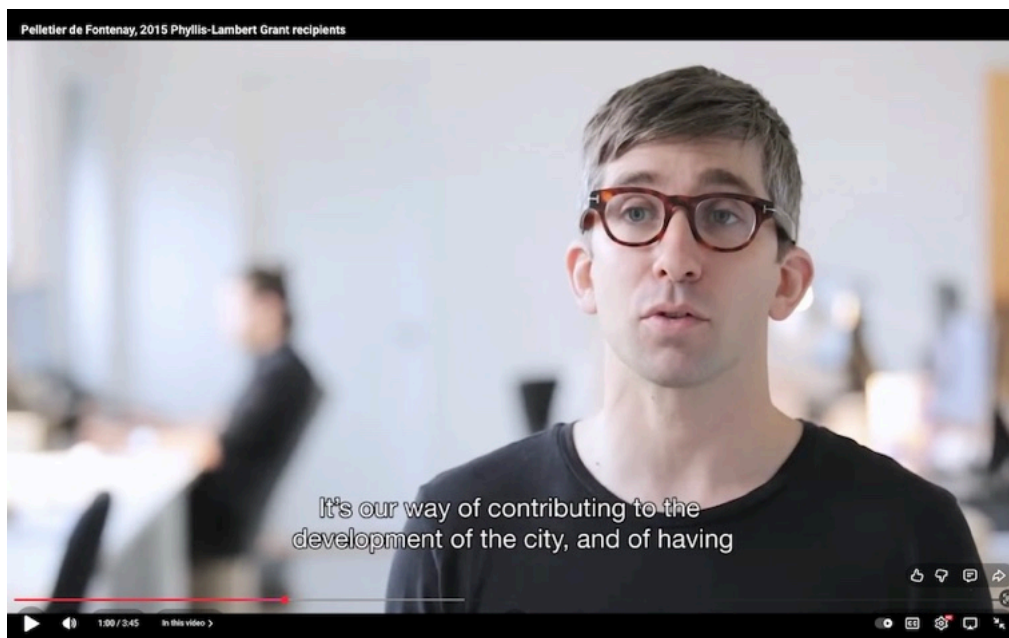
HR Costs

The more substantial expense was that of managing the grant itself: receiving budget approval for the programme from the City, selecting and approaching jury members, setting up the submissions process and deliberation criteria, preparing the press releases, coordinating the video production and otherwise managing the associated logistics.

Bureau du design would connect them with their counterparts within the host UNESCO Creative Cities. The host city organisations offered differing levels of support with some taking the laureates completely under their care, providing translators, guides and connections to specific contacts within their networks, and others providing connections to local design networks, and others having a more hand-off approach. The level of involvement also depended on the winners themselves, some of whom already had their own contacts and planning, and others needed more specific help.

Promotional Support

The promotional support provided included a **press release** which was issued through the v2comm newswire ("the world's largest specialized media network publishing the most prestigious architecture and design publications.") and a **video produced by the Bureau du design for each of the winners**. At a stage where very few had the capacity to undertake this kind of promotional production, the videos were appreciated by the winners as something they could use to share information about their practice with potential clients.



A still from the promotional video of Pelletier de Fontenay from YouTube.

3. Laureates

2008

Philippe Lamarre

The inaugural recipient of the Phyllis Lambert Grant was Philippe Lamarre. Trained as a graphic designer, Lamarre proposed a project documenting vernacular graphic design in cities, comparing Montréal with Buenos Aires and Berlin. An entrepreneur at heart, he first founded the graphic design agency TOXA, followed by the magazine URBANIA. He later served as President of Québec's association of graphic designers, the *Société des designers graphiques du Québec* (SDGQ).

Today, URBANIA has grown into a full-fledged media platform employing 80 people in Montréal, and Lamarre's work focuses on cultural content creation. In 2020, URBANIA opened an office in France that staffs an additional 20.



Ying Gao's 'IN CAMERA' mesh, PVDF, electronic components. Video of garment in movement [here](#). Photos: Ying Gao.

2009

Ying Gao

Gao is a fashion designer who combines material exploration, design research and technology. For her Phyllis Lambert Grant project she travelled to Berlin (Germany) and



Nagoya (Japan). In Japan, she discovered super organza, a material she continues to work with today, and established relationships with textile manufacturers that remain central to her practice.

Working under her own name, Gao produces pieces that have been exhibited in museums and exhibitions around the world. Her work has been featured in VOGUE, Elle, Dezeen, Domus, Forbes, and Fast Company. Alongside her studio practice, Gao is a full-time professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal, where she has trained multiple generations of emerging talent.

2010

Mouna Andraos and Melissa Mongiat (Daily tous les jours)

Andraos and Mongiat are participatory and interaction designers who create urban installations and experiences blending music, technology, and design. Together, they founded the studio Daily tous les jours and have been collaborating for 15 years. With the support of the Phyllis Lambert Grant, they completed a research residency at the Open City Design Lab in Berlin focused on maker culture and participatory urban design. Following the grant, they gained significant international recognition, including the Fast Company Innovation by Design Award. Today, *Daily tous les jours* is an internationally renowned studio with permanent installations in the United States, Australia, and Germany, as well as touring works. This year, the studio



Musical Swings by Daily tous les jours at the Buchheim Museum in Germany. Photo credits: (above) Florian Holzherr (below) Julia Rejmer.



published its first book, *Strangers Need Strange Moments Together*.

2011

Guillaume Sasseville (SSSVLL)

Sasseville is an industrial designer who practices under his eponymous studio and also teaches at the *Université du Québec à Montréal* (UQÀM). His Phyllis Lambert Grant project focused on local manufacturing, exploring the expertise in glass production available in Graz, Austria. *Verres Communes* is a glassware collection that was developed through his research project. Working with manufacturers in Austria, the collection was produced and ultimately became part of the permanent collection of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Québec City (MNBAQ). Sasseville was the only grant recipient to produce a collection from his project.

Today, Sasseville continues to teach and practice, while also showing his work internationally and curating exhibitions, including the Canadian design showcase *Artisanat Industriel* (Industrial Craft) at UQÀM's *Centre de design*.

Stackable stool collection in white oak by SSSVLL. Photo credit: Arseni Khamzin.



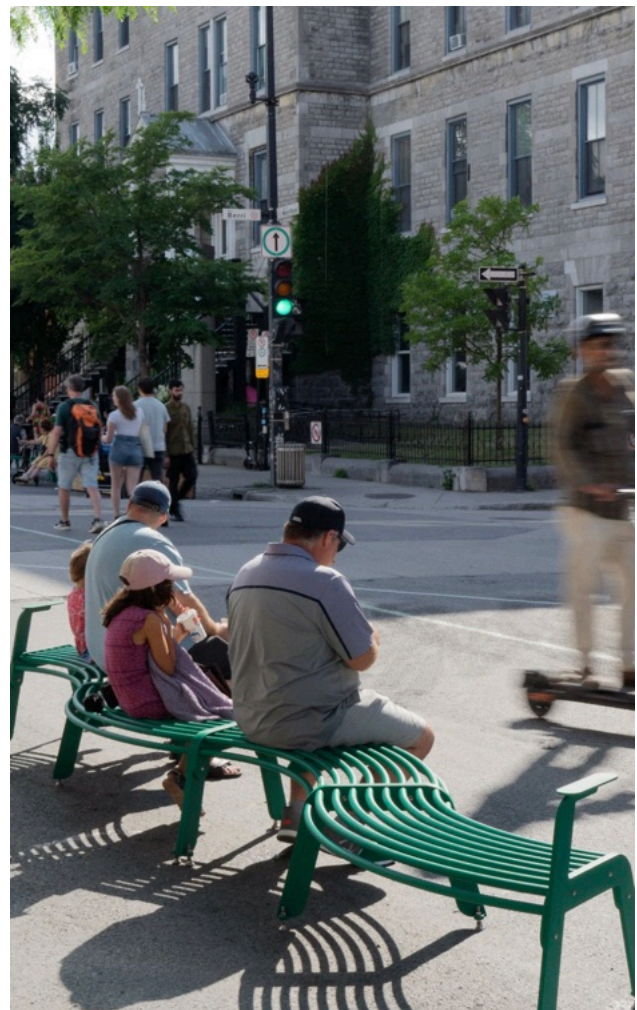
2012

Eugénie Manseau and Philippe Carreau (Dikini)

Manseau and Carreau are industrial designers who work in the urban space. They practice under the studio name *Dikini*. For the *Phyllis Lambert Grant*, they carried out a research project in Seoul, South Korea, exploring public space and technology in a dense urban environment. At the time, the widespread push to embed digital technology into public environments raised questions about sustainability and long-term maintenance. The project sought to understand how Seoul addressed these issues – both spatially and culturally. In keeping with their focus on the city, the studio continued collaborating with municipal partners after receiving the grant, including developing urban furniture, electric vehicle charging stations, and even a signage system facilitating circulation during construction. Today, Manseau teaches at UQÀM and is pursuing graduate studies, while Carreau continues to run *Dikini*.



Méandre (Meander) benches by Dikini in Montréal



2013

Yannick Guéguen and Étienne Legast (Audiotope)

Audiotope is an experimental cooperative exploring the relationship between sound and urban space. Legast and Guéguen were

the members of the collective that submitted the winning application for the Phyllis Lambert Grant in 2013. Legast, a sound artist and composer trained in electro-acoustics, operates at the intersection of sound, environment, and public space. Guéguen has a diverse background spanning art, landscape architecture, and industrial design, and practices as an environmental designer specializing in soundscape research. Their early projects took the form of sound walks and performances – artistic experiences that encouraged people to listen critically to their surroundings and to perceive the urban environment through its sonic dimension. For the Phyllis Lambert Grant, *Audiotopie* proposed a research project examining and recording the soundscapes of “interior cities” – enclosed urban environments such as metro systems and shopping malls – in Nagoya (Japan), Shenzhen (China), and Seoul (South Korea). Guéguen has since left *Audiotopie* and established his own practice in Québec City, where he develops sound-based interactive tools and pursues his independent research.

2014

Émilie F. Grenier

Having initially studied classical culture, film theory, and comparative literature in Montréal before completing a graduate degree in design (Textiles Futures) at Central Saint Martins in London, Émilie F. Grenier describes herself as a “narrative designer and experiential designer.” She received the

Phyllis Lambert Grant for her project *Narratives as Design Material*, which connected Montréal and Reykjavík – the latter being the only Creative City represented among the winners that is not designated a City of Design, but rather a City of Literature. During her extended period in Iceland producing her grant project, Grenier engaged with both the local design and writing communities, participating in talks and creative collaborations, while gathering materials for her *matériauthèque* (materials library).

Over time, her work moved from intimate, object-based projects to large-scale immersive environments and performative technologies—installations in festivals, concerts, and even decommissioned hydroelectric plants. Today, Grenier is Principal and Executive Creative Director at TAIT, a global company known for producing large-scale experiential projects – including Rihanna’s Super Bowl LVII Halftime Show.

2015

Hubert Pelletier and Yves de Fontenay (Pelletier de Fontenay)

Pelletier and de Fontenay are architects with backgrounds in industrial design. They founded their practice, *Pelletier de Fontenay*, in 2010. For the grant, they proposed a research project aimed at deepening their exploration of living-ecosystem architecture—greenhouses, zoos, museums—work that complemented their design of the Montréal



School in Shefford, Québec by Pelletier de Fontenay. Photo Credit: James Brittain.



Insectarium. Their research trip took them to Berlin and other German cities. Although they submitted a written report—one Pelletier later regretted not publishing more broadly—the grant’s real impact was felt in the Insectarium itself, whose design was enriched and informed by their findings.

In the years that followed, *Pelletier de Fontenay* won multiple architecture competitions for schools, libraries, and other public buildings. Today, the firm has 15–20 employees and is recognized as a conceptual, research-driven practice. They are recipients of the prestigious Architectural League of New York’s **League Prize** and are currently working on a school in Louňovice, Czech Republic, awarded through an international competition.

(2016)

2017

Lambert Rainville and Nicholas Sangaré (Rainville Sangaré)

Lambert Rainville and Nicholas Sangaré trained together as industrial designers. They founded the studio *Rainville Sangaré*, which provides interior and industrial design services, and a manufacturing company, *Isle*, that produces hardware for interiors. For the Phyllis Lambert Grant, they proposed a research project in Helsinki (Finland) investigating the interfaces between

architecture and the city, examining the objects that mediate these interactions (such as door handles and mailboxes). Taking Alvar Aalto's *Gesamtkunstwerk* approach (his commitment to designing at every scale, from buildings to stools) as a starting point, they also travelled to Jyväskylä (Aalto's hometown), where they could study several of his buildings firsthand.

Trained also as an architectural technologist, Sangaré runs the studio—now known simply as *Sangaré*—where he produces furniture and undertakes interior design and architecture projects. Sangaré is one of the founders of Ensemble, a design collective that mounts group exhibitions in Montréal, New York, and Toronto. Rainville now owns and operates *Établi*, a furniture company, and is the Creative Director and Director of Product Development for the furniture company *Must Société* (Maison Corbeil).



The Montréal flagship of Canadian brand Want Les Essentiels by Rainville Sangaré. Photo Credit: Alex Lesage.



4. Impacts on Studios

Predictably, all (100%) of interviewed grantees described the *Phyllis Lambert Grant* as having a meaningful, positive, and often decisive impact on their careers

Some examples of the effects they described include:

- the grant accelerated their career
- it provided crucial legitimacy, credibility, or symbolic value
- it shaped their studio's methodology, working methods, and viewpoint
- it strengthened confidence at a decisive career moment
- it supported research or experimentation that later influenced their trajectory
- it contributed to visibility, recognition, or professional networks
- it was described as "pivotal," "transformative," "determining," "important," or arriving at the "right moment"

Every single winner interviewed made some combination of these claims. No interviewees downplayed the value of the grant or suggested it had been inconsequential.

A handful of applicants – who had not won – were selected for interviews as a comparative. This positive estimation of the grant was also true of the control group, to the extent that they could estimate what the value *would have been* or was on those studios that did win.

One important limitation of this type of analysis is that we cannot compare alternate timelines. It is difficult for the winners to gauge the degree to which their success was due to their own hard work and talent or the impact of outside support like the grant. Self-attribution bias – the individuals' tendency to attribute successes to their own personal skills and failures to factors beyond their control – will inevitably factor in.

Entrepreneurship

Of the nine studios and individuals that were awarded the grant, all, at one point or another, started and ran one or more companies. This is not the norm within this industry.

A challenge of the Canadian design industry is the low number of established design studios in place to train young designers. In places with more established studios (NYC, London and Europe), the most common career path is to finish school and work for a

studio (something that 50% of the laureates did abroad). In those markets, some portion of these designers will then start their own studios, but other career paths are available as an employee. It is certainly a self-selected trait but it seems that **ambition and entrepreneurial drive are attributes that contribute to applying for the grant.**

Whether the grant itself contributed to the success of these firms is hard to tell. Of the other 56 applicants (those that applied to the grant over the nine iterations but did not win), only about 30% have successfully opened their own studios (rough estimate based on LinkedIn profiles). This could very well be attributed to the selection process itself – choosing the most talented, and therefore those most likely to succeed – rather than the impact of the grant.

Confidence, Motivation & Psychological Impact

"It reminded us that we weren't the only ones who believed in what we were doing" was how Legast (*Audiotopie*) explained it. Though most of the winners had already achieved some level of success in their careers thus far (working for recognized studios, gaining admission to and graduating from internationally important graduate schools, having had opportunities to work with celebrated designers), for most of them, the **recognition was still necessary** to develop the confidence to excel. "It propelled us to push forward with projects we might otherwise have hesitated to pursue," was how

Daily tous les jours explained it. Manseau (co-founder of Dikini) explained that "at that stage... there is an element of not being sure of one's value... the recognition gave us concrete proof of our capacity." Gao said that the recognition "served as a powerful encouragement. It gave her confidence, and that confidence translated into concrete action" describing that she "traveled more, initiated new collaborations, and gained a stronger sense of legitimacy in her practice."

It was as if their own potential was unlocked by this outward confirmation of their capacity. Carreau (co-founder of Dikini) probably encapsulated it best: "those who



Phyllis Lambert • 2nd
Founding Director Emeritus, Canadian Cent...

4d ...

Je suis éra vie de lire ces mots sur l'œuvre avant garde de Ying Gao. L'inspiration de l'art et à la base des très grand génie, Je pense à Frank Gehry qui vient de quitter cette terre - Ces chef-d'œuvre loin de tout approche dans son art, s'inspirait de comment ils peignait Certains artistes comme la brosse touchait la toile dan des cas des artistes qui l'intéressait ou des collages et comment l'on puisse y parvenir en architecture.

Show translation

Like · 5 | Reply · 1 reply



ying gao **Author**
Designer, Professor UQAM

4d ...

Phyllis, merci beaucoup, chère phyllis, je suis très touchée de vous lire

Show translation

Like | Reply

A comment from Phyllis Lambert on Ying Gao's LinkedIn page on 07 December 2025.

THEME	RECURRENCE	INTERVIEWEE PERSPECTIVES
Confidence, Motivation & Psychological Impact	HIGH	Nearly every winner (Lamarre, Gao, DTLJ, Sasseville, Dikini, Legast, Guéguen, Grenier, Pelletier, Sangaré) describes the Phyllis Lambert Grant as a <i>confidence boost</i> , <i>legitimizing</i> , <i>psychologically reinforcing</i> , or arriving at a <i>critical moment</i> of insecurity or transition.
Peer Networks / Community / Bridging Disciplines	MEDIUM	Mentioned strongly by DTLJ, Dikini, Sasseville, Grenier, Audiotopie, Pelletier de Fontenay, Sangaré. Not universal, but a major theme among winners who engaged in collaborative fields.
Prestige / Symbolic Capital / Seal	HIGH	All but one winner emphasised the symbolic value of Phyllis Lambert's name , the prestige of being the single annual laureate, and the importance of institutional endorsement.
Increased Visibility	HIGH	Most winners (Lamarre, Gao, DTLJ, Dikini, Sasseville, Grenier, Sangaré) describe media visibility , communications from the Bureau du design, or visibility as a defining impact.
Legitimacy / Business Credibility / Professional Positioning	HIGH	Almost universal. Winners report improved credibility with clients, architects, peers, and institutions; used the prize as a credential in portfolios and CVs.
Institutional & City Credibility / Civic Endorsement	MEDIUM–HIGH	Very common among those working in urban, public space, architecture, and civic design (DTLJ, Dikini, Pelletier, Guéguen). Less central for product- or fashion-oriented designers.
Career Acceleration	MEDIUM–HIGH	Many winners explicitly describe the Phyllis Lambert Grant as an accelerator ("propulsion," "saved five years," "momentum")
Studio Consolidation & Growth	MEDIUM	Relevant mainly for winners already forming studios (DTLJ, Dikini, Rainville Sangaré, Pelletier de Fontenay). For solo practitioners (Gao, Grenier) the effect is present but less structural.
Line of Credit / Financial Support	MEDIUM	More prominent for early-stage studios (DTLJ, Dikini, Sangaré) who describe the grant as a critical financial cushion .
Internationalization / Export Effects	MEDIUM	Nearly all winners travelled internationally and many forged ongoing contacts, though export outcomes were uneven. High experiential value, mixed long-term commercial impact.
Creative & Intellectual Ambition / Quality of Work	HIGH	Strong cross-case pattern: winners felt the Phyllis Lambert Grant validated or elevated their experimental, research-based, or conceptual ambitions.
Work Methodology / Professionalization	MEDIUM–HIGH	Many report the grant clarified their methodology , forced written articulation, provided space for reflection, or permanently shaped professional thinking.
Support for Research & Innovation	HIGH	One of the strongest themes: the Phyllis Lambert Grant uniquely supported design research (sound, narrative, public space, material culture, etc.), which is rarely funded elsewhere.
Civic Engagement (sense of contribution to Montréal)	MEDIUM	Strong for Lamarre, DTLJ, Dikini, Pelletier, Grenier. Less salient for designers focused more on objects or fashion.
Return / Stay in Canada	LOW–MEDIUM	Explicit for Dikini, DTLJ, Grenier; implied for Sangaré.
Missed Opportunities	MEDIUM	Many mention: lack of follow-up, weak alumni network, limited dissemination, or unsustained visibility.

dared to apply were often already driven and ambitious." The award, therefore, "both validated and motivated" this emerging creative elite.

Prestige

There also seemed to be a rather important consensus that the grant had an **important symbolic value**. Though they almost all were uncomfortable with the term "prestige" with its connotations of elitism— some going so far as to use air quotes when they used the word — it came up in almost all the interviews. The grant offered a kind of seal of quality, differentiating the grantees positively from the average. Similarly, the association with Phyllis Lambert, for whom they unanimously had enormous respect, represented an important achievement for all of them.

Lamarre explained that the "prize had rigour and seriousness" and that "receiving it... felt highly prestigious." Gao stated that "winning a grant that bore Phyllis Lambert's name... carried real symbolic weight." Carreau stated that the grant, which was associated with "a small circle of respected designers," represented a valuable opportunity to "gain recognition and differentiate themselves within Montréal's design landscape" and also to "establish their professional reputation," as they were a new studio.

Professional Legitimacy

One of the reasons this recognition was important for the interviewees was that it conferred a certain legitimacy on their work. Whether it was because they were pioneering emerging design practices — those of Ying Gao, Émilie F. Grenier, *Daily tous les jours* and *Audiotopie* stand out — or simply because, as young studios, they needed to prove themselves to compete against more established studios for work, the recognition had explicit business impacts. *Daily tous les jours* said that they "believe the recognition gave their clients extra confidence." Carreau said that winning the grant "gave them credibility with architects and landscape architects" (working in urban design, these are among Dikini's key clients). Almost all of the interviewees said that they still — between eight and seventeen years later — list the grant in their CVs, bios or portfolios.

Institutional Legitimacy

This recognition extended to institutional clients and funders. About half of the winners went on to collaborate with the City, completing projects that ranged from signage to community centres. Some went on to win other awards. Though it was unknown to them if the recognition had any impact on their requests, the winners did list this accolade in grant requests and bids for work that would be successful. Mongiat recounted that when *Daily tous les jours* had just won the grant, they had just completed a small project with the *Quartier des spectacles* [the organization

that runs the entertainment district in Montréal]. They were then asked back to work on a larger project. "I'm really curious to know whether they would have had the same confidence in us otherwise" she mused, "the prize gave us a certain weight, I think, in the eyes of the public sector."

According to Carreau, receiving an award from the City of Montréal for a project about public space created "a strong sense of coherence and legitimacy within their field." This municipal recognition proved meaningful as they later bid for – and won – projects with Parks Canada and other "municipal public space competitions, where the grant's prestige likely added weight to their proposals, even if subtly."

Career Acceleration

In some cases the impact was seen more as a way to accelerate their career growth. Grenier compared the grant to appearing in the Forbes 30 under 30, saying it was "a form of propulsion that accelerated [her] trajectory by several years." *Daily tous les jours* said that "the prize offered recognition, credibility, and *momentum*," noting that in their case, "it came at exactly the right time – early enough to act as a real boost." Gao described the grant as a "catalyst – not necessarily changing her trajectory but accelerating it." Manseau recounted how it had helped them in their business development activities, stating that "it really put fire in us to use the lever we were given." She compared it to a "start-up accelerator."

Creative and Intellectual Ambition

This opportunity to "take a step back" and pursue their professional interests in international environments, where their requests and investigation were not only tolerated but actively supported through a network of allies, validated and elevated their experimental, research-based, or conceptual ambitions. Though they had interest in this level of practice and perhaps had even explored in the past within their educational institutions or working abroad, it was often the grant that opened the door for their first experiences as independent studios or independent designers. These early experiences set the bar higher for them, in terms of what they demanded from themselves.

Grenier calls her application to the grant a "leap of faith"—a moment she describes as a powerful gesture of validation, both for her personally and for the broader field of experiential design in Montréal. She describes the situation in 2014: Grenier's work didn't easily fit existing categories, and the conversations that followed—particularly with the Commissioner of the *Bureau du design*, Marie-Josée Lacroix, and others—helped articulate and name a new field: narrative experience design. The grant, she says, not only supported her project but **formally acknowledged this discipline** as part of the city's design ecosystem.

Support for Research

The Phyllis Lambert Grant uniquely supported design research—including experimental fields such as sound, narrative, public space, and material culture—areas that are rarely funded elsewhere.

Guéguen (*Audiotopie*) described it as “a kind of residency enabling research” noting that “there are still very few grants in this area.” Mongiat explained that “it’s the engineering side of our projects—the technical R&D—that gets funded. But design research is very hard to justify. There really isn’t any support for it.”

Inspiration and Innovation

For Pelletier, being able to visit and see how architecture worked – beyond studying it in books – was “extremely crucial,” noting that “we’re at a real disadvantage compared to European or Japanese architects, who live surrounded by a density of projects they can visit and learn from, giving them a truly embodied architectural culture.” He added that in Québec “everything is spread out and much harder to access. What we do have access to is quite recent architecture.” He stressed that for this reason “the travel component was extremely important for us.”

Grenier explained that the grant money in fact represented time. She had been in Iceland for two months, which she described as “fertility in terms of experience.” She recalls being struck by the “immediacy and generosity of the Icelandic design culture,

where boundaries between disciplines seemed nonexistent.” She called the milieu “hyperactive” explaining that “everyone teaches, does exhibitions, craft and constant experimentation. Designers were also artists, writers, and teachers, collaborating fluidly; they didn’t ask if what they were doing was design or something else, the creative gestures just flowed.” There was little hierarchy, she explained, only enthusiasm and collective experimentation—a spirit of experimentation, generosity and lack of pretension she found “inspiring” and later sought to reproduce in her own practice in Montréal.

Interestingly, the laureates were not only inspired by the designs they encountered but also by the business models. Rainville recounts how looking at Finnish manufacturing (how the ceramics manufacturer Arabia, built up their production capacities, for instance) inspired reflection on the state of manufacturing in Québec. In this way, the travel experiences opened up the studios to the possibility of doing things differently, even entrepreneurially.

Professionalization and Development of Methodology

This “freedom” to experiment was precisely what led many of the studios to develop their own unique work methodologies. From Ying Gao’s material explorations in super-organza to *Pelletier de Fontenay*’s research-based approach to architecture, each and every studio developed more advanced ways of

working or had a turn in their career path that led them to the place they are today.

Pelletier describes the value of this “when you have time to think about it and develop concepts central to your practice, you carry them with you, it becomes transversal to all your projects, this becomes a transversal competency.” He affirmed that ideas they developed (what they called *Architectures of Captive Nature*) “remained central [to *Pelletier de Fontenay’s* practice] for over a decade.” *Daily tous les jours* stated that “the experience of researching and prototyping in an open, interdisciplinary environment deeply influenced their methodology.”

For Rainville (of *Rainville Sangaré*), the experience “was about seeing design *in situ*: walking into a public building, noticing how a product from a catalog had been slightly modified for that specific context, or how small adaptations gave the architecture its unique character.” He called it a “full-scale laboratory of design.” Rainville has adopted Finland’s concept of “democratic design” into his core design philosophy. “Not cheap design” he clarified, but “accessible, well-made, locally-produced design.” The experience “validated [his] belief that cultural impact matters more than financial gain, and that small, locally-grounded design practices can still reach a high level of sophistication and influence.” The company he now runs, *Établi*, embodies these ideas.

Grenier recounts how the grant put her on a path of experimentation. Soon after winning, she established her own research/ R&D

practice. In 2017, three years after receiving the grant, she joined the National Film Board of Canada as Creative Director of its Interactive Studio, and later, in 2020, she became Creative Director at TAIT, where she continues to develop large-scale experiential projects worldwide. Her practice is still based on the process validated by the grant all those years earlier, which she describes as “carte blanche” and “jumping into the void”

Peer Networks

As the years went by and more laureates joined the ranks, the Phyllis Lambert grantees started to become a peer network. Though many of them knew each other previously— sometimes quite well— each new addition to the cohort was one more potential collaborator, colleague, and inspiration. In a city with many design studios but not that many internationally-recognized designers, this was something to build from, creating a **community of mutually-respected and equally ambitious peers.**

Carreau recounted that they (Dikini) had become aware of *Daily tous les jours* subsequent to their winning the Phyllis Lambert Grant and that he “had contacted them from Germany to initiate a collaboration” even before he later applied to the grant.

“Over the years these relationships were important, having led to shared projects and a strong network of mutual help and support among peers” explained Manseau. Grenier called it a “sense of affiliation” and adds, that

though they did not keep it up on their own, she “still feels a kind of kinship, especially when she sees the others’ achievements.”

These connections led to shared commissions and collaborations. *Dikini* and Sasseville in turn worked with *Daily tous les jours* on a variety of urban installations. Gao invited Lamarre to lecture at her university. Today Gao, Manseau, and Sasseville work at UQAM where Mongiat also lectures.

Studio Consolidation and Growth

Most of the studios interviewed were in the very early stages at the point that they received the grant. Sasseville saw the grant as a kind of seed funding, recounting that he “was looking for a way to make a first project to initiate his business.”

For *Dikini*, “the writing of the grant helped us consolidate our ideas” explained Manseau but the “travel allowed them to observe and reinvent their practice.” She compared it to “a strategic planning retreat,” relating that she and her partner (Carreau) had never had so much uninterrupted time together to plan the future of their studio. They were able to observe things together and it gave them ideas which later developed into foundational principles for them as a studio. When asked whether the grant influenced *Dikini*’s growth, Carreau answered “yes –both in terms of financial growth and in terms of adding people to the studio. It played a part in building momentum during the studio’s formative years.” For *Daily tous les jours* the grant sustained their fledgling operation

through the first months “like a first line of credit.”

Though the studios have been through ups and downs, for at least four of the nine companies created, the grant represented a step in a ladder of stable growth.

Today, *Daily tous les jours* have 15 employees, *Pelletier de Fontenay* have between 15-20 employees (varies), *Audiotopie* have 11 employees, and *URBANIA* has 80 (in Canada).

Internationalization Effects/ Export

International experience previous to the grant was almost universal. Of the thirteen individuals interviewed, only two did not have international experiences (and those two were partnered in businesses with someone who did). Eight of the thirteen (62%) had received schooling abroad – Bachelor or Masters degrees– and six had also worked abroad.

They further deepened these international experiences through the grant. The grant projects became an excuse to contact people they were interested in meeting: manufacturers, fellow designers and architects, and other parts of the international community. Not only did they discover that they were welcomed into foreign design communities, but they were able to observe how design studios and designers practice in other cultures.

When Lamarre expanded his business to France, he realized how much the grant experience had prepared him for this internationalization. He described approaching the challenge in the same way he had during the grant: arriving in a new environment, meeting people, building networks from scratch. The project had taught him how to adapt, how to start over in unfamiliar contexts, and how to find his footing creatively and professionally anywhere in the world.

For some the projects created relationships with foreign manufacturers or suppliers that endured throughout their careers. Gao revealed that she "continued to maintain professional ties with her Japanese contacts, specifically the manufacturers of the super organza textile."

Perhaps even more than all the others, *Daily tous les jours* today have a truly international practice. With 65% of their income coming from export and their installations being found all over North America, Europe and even Australia.

Promotion and profile

One of the components of the grant was investment in promotion. A high number of the laureates describe this media visibility, as a defining impact. Lamarre said that the grant "brought a wave of media attention." Gao described the media coverage following the award as "strong for that time, particularly impressive given that social media had not

yet taken off," she was pleased that the traditional media outlets had "enthusiastically relayed the news, which gave her work a significant level of prestige." Manseau stated that the promotion "led to a wave of media attention – articles, interviews, and public recognition – that Dikini had never experienced before."

Grenier, who at the time was striving to establish not only herself but a whole new branch of design, credits the video produced by the *Bureau du design* with "legitimizing" and "helping audiences understand" her work. She asserts that the video was a kind of "passport" that became an important tool for her practice.

Rainville Sangaré's win coincided with the 50th anniversary of Habitat 67, and their studio had just completed an interior in one of the units. Sangaré recalled that the combined exposure from the two – the grant and the Habitat 67 project – had attracted a lot of media attention, giving them "a burst of visibility." According to Sangaré, in the resulting interviews, "journalists would mention the grant alongside [their] projects, which helped establish them as part of a new generation of Montréal designers."

Sasseville estimated that the promotion he received through the grant seemed to have the desired effect. "I was contacted by a headhunter shortly after." On the other hand the coverage had been local (not international) and it "came too early to capitalize on the project itself" (the promotion had announced his winning the

grant before the project had been realized). He noted that it had been "more useful for him when the City did a second round of promotion later on – they also had paid for a press release for the 'Verre Commun' collection."

Civic Engagement

The connection of the grant to the City of Montréal was especially important for those directly involved with the urban environment. "It strengthened his connection to the city [he] was working for" was how Lamarre explained it. Being something of an Ambassador for the City and having their accomplishments be publicly acknowledged, gave them a sense of being connected to their City, of giving back in some way. This was further cemented by their relationship with the *Bureau du design*. Lamarre noted that Lacroix "involved him in projects for the city, invited him to serve on juries."

Guéguen emphasized that the award's description—recognizing designers interested in the city and its evolution—reflected his own values. He appreciated that it **"emphasized public interest and the designer's civic role rather than purely formal excellence."**

5. Comparison Group

The comparison group was not randomly selected. Of the 65 unique applicants to the grant over the nine calls for entry, we selected five who had gone on to establish successful studios. The intention with this selection was to compare studios and designers of similar talent and ambition.

2017

Justin Lortie (Wedge)

Justin Lortie is a Montréal-based graphic designer and the founder of Wedge, an independent brand and design studio known for creating distinct, character-driven identities for progressive consumer brands. After graduating from UQÀM's graphic design program in 2011 and gaining early experience at Sid Lee, Lortie spent several years freelancing for leading Montréal studios such as LG2 and Paprika. Those formative years sharpened his skills in client management, communication, and strategic design.

Lortie is ambitious, and at a critical moment in his career, when he was considering leaving Montréal in order to succeed, he instead set himself the challenge of creating "world-class work" here. Lortie launched Wedge in 2016, and his partner, Sarah Di Domenico, joined in 2018, helping grow Wedge into a studio recognized for blending strategic thinking with bold, culturally informed aesthetics inspired by art, architecture, and everyday life.

Today, Wedge has an impressive portfolio of international clients and collaborates with a network of employees and freelancers across Canada, the United States, and Germany.

2017

Cécile Combelle and Antonio Di Bacco (Atelier Barda)

Atelier Barda is an architecture practice founded by Cécile Combelle and Antonio Di Bacco, who first met while studying architecture in Toulouse. Combelle developed an early interest in research through her involvement in a university lab—an orientation that would later shape the studio's ethos. While still in France, the duo received the **EDF Grant**, which enabled a formative research trip across the United States. This experience proved pivotal,

helping define their architectural approach as one grounded in observation, documentation, and critical reflection, alongside a commitment to advancing research for the benefit of the broader community. They built relationships with institutions including Princeton, the Sorbonne, and universities in Italy, presenting and publishing work that strengthened their international profile.

After working in Paris, they moved to Montréal in 2009—initially for a year-long professional pause that ultimately evolved into the founding of *Atelier Barda*. Today, the studio is recognized for its refined, research-driven architectural work, including high-profile projects such as the flagship store for Canadian outerwear brand Kanuk in New York City and the Centre CAB in Montréal.

2015

Jonathan Lapalme

Jonathan Lapalme is a serial social entrepreneur, strategic designer, systems thinker, and film director whose recent work operates at the intersection of design, civic innovation, and future-oriented storytelling.

He began his academic path in media and cultural production strategy before completing a Master's degree in *Design and Urban Ecologies* at Parsons – The New School for Design in New York. Upon returning to Montréal, Lapalme co-founded *Entremise*, a project that proposed a citywide strategy for activating vacant spaces—an

approach reflecting his broader interest in systemic transformation. He later founded the Canadian chapter of *Dark Matter Labs*, further advancing his commitment to reshaping how institutions think, collaborate, and make decisions.

Lapalme's current focus is on participatory "future films": collaborative short docu-fictions that bring together designers, policymakers, scientists, and other stakeholders to imagine and visualize possible futures in areas such as governance, finance, and material cycles. Through this transdisciplinary practice, he continues to push design beyond artifacts and aesthetics, positioning it as a catalyst for collective foresight and societal change.

2013

Talia Dorsey

Talia Dorsey is an architect whose practice integrates strategic design, systems analysis, and civic vision. After completing a BA at Princeton, she earned her Master's degree in Architecture from MIT. Dorsey then joined the practice of celebrated Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, OMA, in Rotterdam. Working within AMO, the firm's research and strategic design think-tank, she gained deep experience in the analytical and systemic dimensions of architecture.

In 2010, Dorsey returned to Montréal and founded her own practice, *The Commons Inc.*, extending her strategic approach to the civic

realm. One of her most ambitious self-initiated projects, *Civic Assets*, a framework to reactivate the social and spatial potential of unused government real-estate through new partnerships, investment models, and reuse strategies, was supported by a grant from the McConnell Foundation.

Dorsey later served as Director of Retail Strategy at the Montréal-based international luxury e-commerce retailer SSENSE, where she led their international expansion and projects including the Montréal flagship store designed by David Chipperfield Architects. Today, Dorsey is Chief of Masterplanning and Development at PHI, where she oversees major development projects and aligns PHI's institutional evolution with its growing portfolio of physical spaces.

2009

Raphaël Daudelin (Co-Founder Studio Feed)

Studio Feed is a Montréal-based design practice founded in 1999 by Anouk Pennel and Raphaël Daudelin. Renowned for its curiosity, confidence, and bold approach, the studio has built an extensive and award-winning body of work.

Pennel and Daudelin met while studying graphic design at UQÀM, at a time when Daudelin was already working as a freelance designer. Following graduation, Pennel completed an internship at Sid Lee as part of a graduation award, while both founders

gained professional experience in other studios. They went on to establish *Studio Feed* while still employed at *Épicentre*, the studio led by François Picard.

Today, *Studio Feed's* practice spans two primary areas: an editorial arm, producing books and magazines such as the contemporary art journal ESSE and the *Daily tous les jours* monograph; and a branding practice serving both cultural and commercial clients. The studio also operates its own type foundry. Its clients include the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, the Montréal Museum of Contemporary Art, Centre PHI, and Air Inuit, among others.

These five applicants were interviewed in an effort to understand their experiences of the grant. Between the two groups – the winners and the applicants— there is very little, if any, difference in perception regarding the value of the grant. However, the impact of the experience on them and their practice is quite different.

Within the comparison group, the perception of the Phyllis Lambert Grant was quite similar to those of the winners. They also spoke of the prestige associated with winning, the

THEME	RECURRENCE	INTERVIEWEE PERSPECTIVES
PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS FOR APPLYING		
Searching for legitimacy	HIGH	Seen in Lortie, Barda, Lapalme, Dorsey (explicit), Daudelin (implicit).
Creative & Intellectual Ambition	HIGH	All interviewees.
PERCEPTION OF THE GRANT		
Prestige / Symbolic Capital	HIGH	All interviewees.
Professional Positioning, Recognition	HIGH	Seen in Lortie, Barda, Lapalme, Daudelin.
Phyllis Lambert's international reputation	MEDIUM-HIGH	Seen in Barda, Lapalme, Dorsey and Daudelin.
Rigour of the contest	MEDIUM-HIGH	Seriousness and credibility, jury, association to City. Seen in Barda, Lapalme, Dorsey and Daudelin.

rigour of the contest itself, and the legacy of Phyllis Lambert.

As they had not experienced winning, they could only estimate the value of the support perceived to be provided to the winners. They all appreciated the importance of the grant existing, and regretted not having won. **Not one of the interviewees diminished the value of the programme or the honour associated with winning.**

Perceptions of the Grant

"The prestige came from Lambert's name" according to Daudelin "that association carried real weight." He recounted that when they had applied, he did not know Phyllis Lambert personally but the studio would later go on to collaborate with the CCA, and he would meet her through her preservation efforts involving Square Viger.

The grant's connection to the *Canadian Centre for Architecture* (CCA), and that "it is not commercial but more research-oriented," according to Combelle and Di Bacco (Atelier Barda) "gives it real credibility." They stress the symbolic importance of "being recognized by Phyllis Lambert and being accepted by your peers." From their vantage point today, having attained that type of recognition eventually, they reflect that it "would have been very valuable" to receive then.

"It did play a role," Dorsey said of the impact of the grant on her confidence that Montréal could prove a fertile place to practice "it felt like it created that space, an invitation to play a role within a larger network and across disciplines."

Motivations for Applying

The applicants had similar motivations for applying as the winners. They were **searching**

OPPORTUNITIES EXPECTED

(BY FREQUENCY)	
Access to institutional / professional networks	4
Time / mental space for research / reflection	4
Belonging to a prestigious community of designers	3
International exposure / comparative learning	3
Legitimizing emerging/experimental design disciplines	3
Access to resources (funding, communications, institutional support)	2

for **legitimacy**. In some cases, they sought this legitimacy for themselves or their studios and in some cases they sought to legitimize emerging areas of practice as well. Dorsey for her strategic approach to architecture and Lapalme for his social-futuristic approach to design.

Almost all of the applicants shared the winners' **intellectual ambitions**, seeking to expand their practice beyond client work to explore new ideas, conduct fieldwork, and develop research-based or conceptual projects. *Atelier Barda* mirrored Grenier's earlier comment that **what was at stake was in fact time** to explore intellectual discovery, disclosing that "time is what is lacking." For Lortie it was a thirst for **exploratory travel**, in order to take in culture and benchmark with the world's leading creatives.

Expectations

The expectations of the applicants seem to align with the experiences of the winners. They wanted to have **access to institutional and professional networks**. Dorsey, who was

just returning to Montréal after a period living and working in Rotterdam, described feeling "untethered." Applying for the grant was a way "into the network, to other practices and to the traditions of architecture and design here [in Montréal]."

Lortie recognized that this was a challenge. He suggested that the Canadians who managed to succeed "went to the RCA and built their networks internationally."

To have the opportunity to take time away from practice to develop their research interests. Combelle describes this added layer of research and exploration as "un deuxième calque" (literally, a second layer of tracing paper, an overlay) over their practice. Their client projects were mostly residential early-on. The research "adds that extra layer to their practice — which may never be seen by the clients, who only see the aesthetic results," but this added layer "keeps them connected to an international network, and exploring wider themes" (Di Bacco is interested in film, for instance). Research elements do make it into the projects "but

EMOTIONAL IMPACTS OF NOT WINNING

(BY FREQUENCY)	
Disappointment / Discouragement	4
Reinforced sense of marginality / misrecognition	3
Strengthened independence / compensatory determination	3
Reduced sense of belonging in design ecosystem	2
Loss of momentum / creative stalling	2
Reframing as appropriate timing	1

they are not discussed with the clients." And today, their body work has become relevant and sought after for cultural projects. "These research projects give our architecture depth," they explain, "They allow us to propose something that isn't just aesthetic — it's thoughtful and grounded."

To gain access to a prestigious community of designers. For instance, Dorsey noted that "emerging practices need not only funding, but also connection." She described a grant program that creates a "network of exchange among early-career designers."

To have access to international networks

"Traveling as part of a programme always has a special appeal," explained Daudelin, "it gives you access to networks and people you'd never meet as a tourist."

For Lortie, "travel is essential to designing but more as trips to see what is happening in other markets." He states that "the Canadian market is not bad but the global market is the *real market*." Lortie explains that the travel they have done as a studio — Finland, Italy, California, NYC — has been a keen source of inspiration for Wedge. "It's so good to leave the internet."

Di Bacco stated that "one should not underestimate the international impact of this grant."

Legitimizing emerging or experimental practices. Lapalme said that he "wanted to help legitimize these emerging forms of design practice that didn't fit the traditional

Are there Substantive Differences?

There are no profound differences between the comparison group and the group of winners. The applicants and the winners group both **went to illustrious schools abroad and worked at prestigious studios** in more or less the same proportion. They all have extremely **successful careers** from the point of view of awards and professional standing.

The two areas where it would seem there is a slight advantage within the winners is that **among the winners, the studios have 50% more employees on average** (this is disproportionately impacted by URBANIA, which is now a large company) and, at least according to the information they publish, the winning studios seem to have a **much higher incidence of international recognition** (international speaking, exhibitions, publication in international media). The winners also hold **academic positions** in slightly greater proportion.

mold," for him, "the application was as much an act of advocacy as a personal pursuit."

To have **access to resources** that can include funding, work opportunities, media coverage, institutional support. Dorsey was seeking time and resources "to develop her ideas further and to connect with global peers working on similar issues."

Lortie recounts that when he applied to the grant, "the \$10 K seemed like a lot of money." He was Airbnb-ing his apartment and sleeping in the studio to fund the business. He saw the grant as a way to "fund a research trip."

Emotional Impact of Loss

The reactions of the applicants to their unsuccessful bids are predictable. Almost all of them felt some **disappointment or even discouragement**. The loss reinforced the sense of being **marginalized or misunderstood** for some, this is especially true for those in emerging practices. "The way that [Lambert] had led and invested herself within the broader processes that affected the built environment, there was a hope that the grant and the programme itself spoke to that type of work," according to Dorsey. However, remarking that the grant had gone to more conventional architects and designers, she described "disappointment; in that it felt like that more broad, transdisciplinary, impact-driven work was not as recognized as built projects." When Lapalme's application was rejected "it confirmed what [he] already sensed—that Montréal's design institutions were not yet ready to recognize such practices as part of design."

For some the loss gave them a **renewed sense of determination**. They felt they had no choice but to succeed by their own devices and simply worked harder. "Today my practice is much clearer," according to Lapalme. He feels he has "earned legitimacy

through persistence and proof of concept rather than institutional validation."

Acceptance is common to all of the applicants, but for Lapalme, it was more than that. He acknowledged that, while his "intentions were clear, the first manifestation of his practice pointed in the right direction" he did not "know if [he] was ready to win the Phyllis Lambert Grant at that point." Lapalme explained that he "wasn't surprised not to have won and looking back, [he thought] there would be **more impact** now than ten years ago."

Looking back, Lortie says that the grant application process felt "too much like art" — full of theory and conceptual language. He emphasizes that the prize has value but that it should be "accessible, flexible, and perhaps less conceptual." He adds that "allowing people some flexibility is important," giving the example of his partner, Di Domenico, connecting with EQ3 (who later became an important client) at the *Interior Design Show* in Toronto: these "happy surprises often yield the most interesting results."

Daudelin explained that the need for research and exploration beyond their day-to-day practice, which motivated their application to the grant, was ultimately met through other means. "Teaching has taken on that role in my life" he explained. Both he and his partner, Anouk Pennel, teach in parallel to their practice. "Teaching forces us to take a step back and look at our work with more distance.

It's a form of reflection, even if it's not the same as formal research."

It is a credit to the City, to Phyllis Lambert and to the winners of the grant, that the applicants **hold the institution in such high regard despite their losses**. The disappointment of losing is not fresh for those interviewed (the most recent of the applicants submitted their work eight years ago), however their regret to have missed out was genuine. As was the respect they still held for the programme.

Application Effect

Unlike some of the winners, most of the applicants felt that the process itself of filling out the grant application had not been particularly useful to them. However, Lortie recounts that the application had required them to name potential collaborators in the host country (in his case, Japan) and that he had reached out to people he "dreamed of meeting" (famous designers who graciously did respond). One of the contacts he made was the *Tokyo Type Directors Club* (who later, unrelatedly, had given Wedge an award).

Dorsey went on to submit her project to the McConnell Foundation and Lapalme eventually received funding through non-traditional partners.

Effects of Other Grants

We found that in the applicant group, **two out of the five had received significant support, in the form of grants from other sources**.

Atelier Barda had won the EDF Foundation grant in France before relocating to Montréal (the EDF Architecture Grant rewards young architects for innovative projects—often related to energy, sustainable urban planning, or the enhancement of heritage. It offers financial support for research or study trips, complementing the company's broader philanthropic initiatives). This is, in fact, a grant that is quite similar to the Phyllis Lambert grant.

Talia Dorsey's studio *The Commons* had received a grant from the McConnell Foundation, a private Canadian foundation that contributes to "diverse and innovative approaches to address community resilience, reconciliation, and climate change."

Among the remaining three who did not receive larger grants, both *Wedge* and *Studio Feed* had received early career prizes in the form of internships, awarded by Sid Lee.

Though the five applicants do not represent all the studios formed by applicants, they are among the most successful. It is possible that of all the candidates that applied, **the most successful have been those that have received some form of support early on**.

6. Impacts for Montréal

Though we had initially set out to study the impacts of the grant on the studios and designers themselves, the interviews revealed some unexpectedly spillovers for both the granting entity (in this case, the City of Montréal) and also the local community.

Impacts – some of them unintended, or at least unexpected – for Montréal included the retention of global talent, reputational impact for Montréal within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, impact on the quality of City infrastructure projects, access to a diverse knowledge base and the creation and deepening of relational networks among City cultural institutions.

In interviews, Marie-Josée Lacroix, who headed the *Bureau du design* for the duration of the grant, confirmed that there had been an intention to create a programme that would **benefit the city and the whole community of designers** from the start.

The *Bureau* was concerned about investing a significant amount of internal resources in a single designer or design team and therefore sought ways for the program to benefit a broader range of stakeholders. One approach

was **judging criteria that encouraged the return of knowledge** that could directly improve the city—for example, *Dikini's* research on urban spaces or *Pelletier de Fontenay's* work, which was applied to the *Montréal Insectarium*.

An expected outcome was that the designers would **develop international networks and be able to share them with the Montréal design community**, which in practical application was limited.

The City also relied heavily on the winners of the grant (and other programmes they held concurrently) for the “*rayonnement*” (a term that would roughly translate to the **radiation of prestige or standing**) of Montréal internationally. The winners were sponsored to give talks, represent Montréal in meetings and encouraged to participate in Awards through the UNESCO Network.

Perhaps more interesting however are the unintentional benefits that were slowly revealed by the winners themselves.

Talent Retention

Of the winners interviewed 86% had either studied abroad or worked abroad. Among the applicants interviewed, 57% had. Within both groups, many mentioned that their decision to come home had been impacted in some measure by the existence of the grant. The

Points of View

The grant's suspension contributed to a more generalized sentiment of lack of support for design, and more specifically for design research. These are some of those viewpoints.

Shift to Academia

Many of those interviewed – both winners and applicants – expressed an ongoing need for research funding within design and architecture. Unlike more technical fields, in design, the creative aspect needs to be nurtured.

Perhaps, this explains why so many of the interviewees – both winners and applicants – have shifted to academia. Manseau describes the shift from the “pragmatic” world of professional practice to the more “idealistic and reflective” world of academia as both “refreshing and nourishing”. She noted that the post-pandemic years have been particularly difficult for design studios. Teaching “allows her to stay connected to design in a different way – through transmission, influence, and applied research.” Manseau clearly values the academic environment at UQÀM, which she

says “encourages research-creation and the continuation of professional practice within an academic framework.” This echoes similar ideas from Daudelin (page 33).

Fading Brand Value

It has been almost a decade since the last grant was given. Manseau lamented that the fact that the grant was no longer being given had “faded the brand somewhat and that it had less value as people were less aware of it.” In a sense that means that the resources the *Bureau* put into building this programme and building the recognition for the grant as a lever to propulse designers, fades as the recognition for the grant fades.

Trust in public institutions

In a rare moment of criticism, Carreau compares Montréal unfavourably to other cities – including Berlin – where design and architecture are supported by public institutions with recognized authority. Montréal, and Canada more generally, in his view, “lacks any comparable institutional voice for design, leaving a vacuum in how design is publicly valued and promoted.”

establishment of the grant and its association with Phyllis Lambert – someone who was firmly established, and whose name would be recognized internationally – indicated to them that opportunities of international calibre were starting to appear within Canada. It was described as an indicator that something was changing and that there was a chance that they could in fact have meaningful careers if they left cities like New York and London and returned home.

Grenier expressed surprise that “people were interested in what [she] was doing.” She admitted that, at the time, she was unconvinced that her work would be accepted as valid in Montréal. Post-London, she had been ambivalent about her career opportunities in Montréal, and had been in the process of deciding whether to stay or not. Winning the grant convinced her that she “could stay in Montréal and have a career” that “what she was doing could be accepted.”

“I think that if it hadn’t felt like something was happening in Montréal—if things weren’t moving, if there were no opportunities or recognition, no momentum—we would have left” Andraos admitted. “We almost moved back to New York.”

Carreau recounted that when he and Manseau were considering returning to Montréal, they saw the grant not just as an opportunity but as “a goal— a symbol of what it meant to belong to this creative momentum.” He affirms that it “reinforced

their decision to return to Montréal and establish *Dikini*.”

Impact on Reputation

Montréal had acquired the title of UNESCO Creative City of Design in 2006, not because it was a design capital by international standards, but because UNESCO acknowledged “the city’s creative *potential* in the design disciplines, based on the strong concentration of talent here as well as the commitment and determination of the Ville de Montréal, other levels of government and civil society to build on those strengths for the purpose of enhancing Montréalers’ quality of life” (*italic ours*).²

The winners consistently affirm that the Phyllis Lambert Grant contributed to building a real design culture where the UNESCO title had previously been mostly symbolic. Half of them explicitly articulate that the award helped Montréal become the design city it aspired to be.

‘Rayonnement’

Within the UNESCO Network this programme in particular was admired and some even attempted to emulate it as a best practice. Montréal even explored the possibility of creating an equivalent network-wide grant at one point (Lacroix).

Lacroix stated that initiatives including the grant and others like *Code Souvenir*, *Portes*

² <https://designmontreal.com/en/montreal-unesco-city-of-design>

Ouvertes Design Montréal, had "provided a vetted pool of highly talented designers—people **who had been selected by rigorous juries and who could act as legitimate ambassadors.**" They could lean on this when they needed to send representatives to UNESCO events, to nominate designers for international awards and even when they had mandates that needed filling. It allowed them "to propose candidates who were credible, experienced, and accustomed to international contexts." These designers became informal ambassadors abroad, they represented Montréal in meetings, exhibitions, festivals, and exchanges. They built bridges with international institutions and they **reinforced Montréal's image as a city of cultural experimentation and civic design abroad.**

Thus, the programme, and the high value of the design talents that were identified through it, were central to Montréal's reputation within the UNESCO Network. Two of the Phyllis Lambert Laureates (*Daily tous les jours* and *Rainville Sangaré*) went on to receive recognition by the *Shenzhen Design Award for Young Talents* (SDAY), an international design competition for young designers from the 350 UNESCO Creative Cities (under the age of 35). Lacroix noted that "the ability to travel, meet peers, and host delegations had anchored Montréal's design diplomacy for years."

What is underlying to the discussion about architectural quality and the importance of research — in both the *Pelletier de Fontenay* and *Atelier Barda* interviews — is that their

architectural practices stand out from many others of similar size and training, precisely because this research and the methodologies they have developed around it, make them better architects. In other words, this has a direct **effect on the competitiveness of Canadian architects internationally.**

Multiple of the design Laureates have also gone on to produce work that has been exhibited internationally and received media attention from leading design media.

Establishing Metrics

A recurring difficulty within design promotion is the determination of what is "good design" and who are "good designers." When funds are invested —whether it be to promote an exhibition of work internationally, to send a representative to act as an 'ambassador' or when granting mandates with public money — the quality of the work and of the professional determines the success of this investment.

In Canada, several public bodies create programmes to support culture (here in Québec there are grants from the *Société de développement des entreprises culturelles* (SODEC) [the Québec Society of Cultural Businesses], the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* (CALQ) [the Québec Council of Arts and Literature], and at the federal level there is the *Canada Council for the Arts and Canadian Heritage*. When they support these sectors, it is useful to have some kind of **metric by which to judge the quality of the work being supported**, in the

case of design, that is the designer's talent, professionalism, and the calibre of their output.

Assuming that these grants and programmes are in place **to mitigate risk and not simply to reward success**, then a mechanism is necessary to identify and evaluate the contributions of young and promising businesses. In this way, financial aid is given to businesses that would not otherwise be able to surmount barriers to growth, rather than to established businesses that could afford to fund their own growth, unsupported. The challenge is identifying these businesses reliably.

Unlike commercial prize schemes – which seek to maximize profit and thus are led to give large numbers of prizes and often without too much discernment – awards of the calibre of the Phyllis Lambert Grant, given by an institution, with a high-level jury, to a very small pool of winners, are **especially reliable indicators**. It does not seem that this was an intended outcome, but for the *Bureau du design* the grant served as this mechanism.

Creating an Expert Pool

The grant also helped the *Bureau* maintain meaningful relationships with skilled designers in their community—people they could mobilize for juries, advisory roles, or municipal initiatives “just as architectural competition winners often become jury members in subsequent years” (Lacroix).

This was especially true when laureates had very precise, specialized fields of expertise. Take, for instance, *Audiotopie*: within architecture and landscape circles, sound was often overlooked – seen as secondary, or simply as noise to be mitigated. Through their research and experimentation, *Audiotopie* demonstrated that sound could be a constructive, expressive element in shaping public spaces. Following the reception of the grant, they were contacted by the *Bureau* when expertise on this matter was required (Legast).

These ‘experts’ also provided an important bridge to explain and advocate for design with the business community and among elected officials. In this sense, Lacroix explained, “the grant had a pedagogical function. Each laureate helped the team sensitize politicians to different parts of the design ecosystem.”

Community Cohesion

Beyond the networks created among the winners of the grant, the grant process itself served to build and secure networks within the city. The cross-disciplinary aspect of the Jury ensured not only that highly competent and civic-minded individuals assist in the process but created links among them that further strengthen the design community. This created and reinforced links between institutions (the CCA, the *Bureau du design*, the Universities) but also within individuals who are, by the nature of the selection process, often ‘bridge’ type profiles, people with trans-disciplinary backgrounds and

practices that can help connect between disciplines. The Jury member we interviewed, Louis-Charles Lasnier, recounted how he went on to develop projects with a co-jury member he met during deliberations.

Impact on the Built Environment

Some of the winners contributed directly to **shaping public spaces and institutions** after winning the grant, contributing to the architectural capital of the city and beyond. The design teams would **bring home international best practices and apply them at home**.

Pelletier de Fontenay not only applied their learnings from the grant project to their work on the *Montréal Insectarium* but went on to win competitions to build schools and community centres both in Montréal and in Québec. The methodologies they developed, deepening their skills as architects, have been leveraged for public enjoyment and overall architectural quality of public spaces, touching hundreds of thousands of citizens (the Insectarium alone receives 400,000 visitors per year³).

Daily tous les jours had their first public installation, their 'Musical Swings', installed in Montréal in 2011 (one year after winning the grant). The swings went on to tour internationally in New York, San José, West Palm Beach, Detroit, Singapore and Dhahran

and now there are permanent installations in the *Buchheim Museum* in Bernried (Germany) and the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh (USA). Many of their installations have been presented in Montréal or feature Montréal references (their exhibit "I Heard There Was a Secret Chord" on Leonard Cohen was shown in Copenhagen at the *Kunstforeningen Museum*).

Dikini also contributed many projects to the urban space, including signage systems and urban furniture. Their opportunity to observe urban contexts firsthand in countries that were much more advanced in their use of technology in this area, enriched their capacities.

Impact on Culture

When the *Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec* (MNBAQ) [the Museum of Fine Arts of the City of Québec] commissioned OMA to produce their new *Pierre Lassonde Pavilion* (completed in 2016), they acquired work from both Émilie F. Grenier (13 objects in collection) and Guillaume Sasseville (8 objects in collection, including glasses from *Verre Commun* produced during the Phyllis Lambert Grant project). Additionally Ying Gao was included in the exhibit: *Art, Mode et Technologie* (Art, Fashion and Technology) in 2011 (also MNAQ).

³ An estimate is based on 350,000 visitors recorded in 2011 by the newspaper *La Presse* and the Espace de La Vie (the centre that includes the Botanical Garden, Insectarium, Planetarium and Biosphere) reported increasing rates for a total of 2.2 M visitors for the complex, including the 4 venues, in 2018

7. Success Factors

When asked what they would do to improve the grant, many said that they would change "nothing"; some even going so far as to say that it was "perfect".

What follows is a description of the various factors that the winners and the applicants identified as **contributing to the overall success and value of the grant programme**. These are opinions but they give important insights into what was done well and how the grant was able to attain the impacts that it did.

Exclusivity/ Rarity Effect

The prestige of the prize is in direct relation to its scarcity. Also, by limiting the grant to one per year – across all disciplines – or only ten laureates per decade, one ensures that the quality of the winners, remains high.

Additionally, as was pointed out by Manseau, the rarity meant that the impact of the promotional investment was more important as "the visibility wasn't diluted."

Timing / Career Stage

The repeated mantra of "the right time" seems to demonstrate that, at least in the

estimation of the winners, the grant gave them a much-needed push at a moment when it was most impactful. As Carreau described it, "a catalyst at a pivotal moment."

However, there are arguments for a later-stage grant. With some hindsight, some are self-aware enough to understand the opportunities they missed. Now pursuing her Masters degree, Manseau reflected that with a solid base of "real research methodology", she now understands how "unstructured their reflections during the grant had been." Looking back, she acknowledges that when they received the grant, she and Carreau had been quite young – with only undergraduate training – and "lacked the research tools that would have allowed them to articulate their project more deeply."

Lacroix had a similar reflection, musing that if she were to put in place a similar programme today, she "would consider adding more flexibility to the eligibility timeline, perhaps loosening the "under ten years of practice" rule.

Institutional Integrity

In Québec, there is a private-sector award programme called the 'Grands Prix du Design' that is produced by a private company, the Agence PID, who also produces a magazine (INT) and trade show (the SIDIM, Salon

International du Design de Montréal, which was last produced in 2023). Every year, it gives out hundreds of prizes to categories including construction, architecture, product design, interior design, photography, marketing and more.

Almost all the interviewees brought up the *Grands Prix du Design* as a counterpoint to the Phyllis Lambert Grant. Whereas the former was described by one of the interviewees as an “epidemic of prizes,” the latter was “selective”, “symbolic”, and “profoundly significant.”

Crucially, the actors involved – the *Bureau du design*, the CCA and Lambert herself – were perceived to be **using their resources, networks, know-how and legitimacy, to elevate both the individual designers and the profession**, instead of profiting off the work of the design community for their enrichment.

The consensus on the private award scheme was the opposite. The profit motive was evident in the quantity of prizes given and, inevitably at this volume, prizes were given to projects of dubious quality.

For Lamarre, the Phyllis Lambert Grant stood out because of its symbolism: “it was not just about money; it represented a connection to the cultural fabric of Montréal and to a legacy of design excellence.”

The Legacy of Phyllis Lambert

Recently featured among Princeton Architectural Press’s “Women Who Changed Architecture,” the legacy of Phyllis Lambert is considerable. The institution she founded, the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), is not only a museum but a premier centre for architecture research, internationally. Through its extensive publications, the CCA further extends its reach: traditional printed books, but also multiple digital formats, including e-publications, audio and film documentaries are available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Japanese.

This breadth of her contribution to Montréal is well defined in the announcement by the City of Montréal of her induction as Commander of the Ordre de Montréal in 2016 (full text on page 02).

In addition to her illustrious career and reputation, Lambert is known to support young architects and designers, and to have a real interest in the profession’s evolution through them. Thus, **the connection is not only symbolic but feels genuine** to those who benefited from her grant and also, in many cases, received her personal support and encouragement.

Manseau recalled meeting Phyllis Lambert and being struck by her generosity and presence. Although their interactions were limited over time, “Lambert remembered her and her work in later encounters, which felt meaningful.”

Grenier explained that the symbolic association with Phyllis Lambert herself carried great weight for her personally – the fact that the grant bore the name of a woman with such a remarkable career and important legacy. Meeting Phyllis Lambert at City Hall during the award ceremony for the grant remains a vivid memory for Grenier. Lambert's presence "embodied a lineage of civic engagement and cultural vision" that Grenier "felt proud to join." She described the passing of the torch from Lambert to the winners as a kind of "symbolic handshake."

Grenier also emphasized how much she valued the connection to the Canadian Centre for Architecture. The participation of CCA representatives on the jury (Giovanna Borasi, the year Grenier won – now Director of the CCA, then a curator) helped link architecture to design, "making certain boundaries more porous."

Gao stated that "having her name associated with that of Phyllis Lambert served as an endorsement, a confirmation of the quality of her own work at a time when she had not yet been entirely convinced of it herself."

Daily tous les jours confirmed that "the name Phyllis Lambert carried weight, particularly in Québec, where it signalled serious recognition by the design establishment."

For Lacroix, "this symbolic dimension is worth preserving. Without attaching the grant to a strong figure, it risks losing some of its resonance."

Cross-Disciplinary Scope

When the *Bureau* elected to have one prize given annually to a designer or architect, they intended to leave the description as vague as possible to encourage the widest possible spectrum of practices to apply (Lacroix). This made the pool larger and increased the chances of receiving good submissions but also let designers define themselves.

As a result, the group of award recipients reflected a broad range of expertise. It made the grant more interesting to the applicants ("freedom" was an attribute that was highly valued by many). The openness allowed outliers like Ying Gao, *Audiotopie* and Émilie Grenier – and Lapalme and Dorsey among the applicants – to pioneer areas within design that had not developed in Montréal until that point.

Andraos and Mongiat emphasized that one of the factors that made the Phyllis Lambert Grant unique was its inclusivity and cross-disciplinary nature. Unlike many awards that separate design into silos – industrial, fashion, graphic, etc. – this one celebrated design as a broad cultural practice.

For only one of the studios— *Audiotopie*— did this diversity in fact become a disadvantage. They described feeling like "UFOs" compared to the other studios. Their practice was so far removed from the universe of the other winners that they were not incorporated into the greater peer group. The promotional efforts, which were focused on traditional design media, did not result in interview

requests, something they attributed to their work being “in an area of design that was less widely understood.” Reflecting back, they questioned how much their being from an “outsider” field affected their experience of the grant. Because they operated on the margins of the traditional architectural and industrial design worlds, they speculated that it might have been **“more difficult for them to leverage the award into new opportunities or collaborations.”**

A High-Calibre Jury

The multi-disciplinarity of the grant rendered the selection of the Jury that much more challenging. Judging criteria in this case became very high-level, and the deliberation relied more heavily on the judgement of every individual in the room. If they were to effectively review the applications of designers from such a wide field of practice, the Jury would be composed of people who individually and collectively covered a wide range of expertise and also had the level of experience and general knowledge that would allow them to contribute to discussions on all areas of design.

Having institutions – universities, the CCA, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Quartier des Spectacles – yielded good results. The *Bureau* was careful to give equal opportunity to the various universities in the City, hoping that natural allegiances (with former colleagues or students) would not impact the outcome. Where possible, jury members were selected with trans-disciplinary backgrounds or work experience. In addition to

professional expertise, the personal motivations of the individuals around the table also mattered. The Bureau succeeded in attracting people who had a genuine interest in the civic good. With Montréal’s community being tight-knit and rather small, it was possible to do this organically.

“The Jury was good” according to Manseau, they had studied the composition of the Jury before applying, “very qualified people.”

An Annual Rhythm

There is a certain momentum that is created by the annual cycle of the prize. This is something that was brought up by the designers, organisers and the jury as well. For the designers, the repeated cycle allowed the grant to be ever-present: between the call for applications, the submissions deadline, the announcement of the winners, and the communications/PR period, the grant remained an ongoing concern.

For the organizers, when the previous year’s grant cycle was still fresh, it was easier to “start the machine.” With ongoing momentum and interest from the previous year, it was easier to convince stakeholders, to recruit jury members and to receive applications organically from the design community.

Cultural Value

It was Carreau that pointed out that “what distinguished the Phyllis Lambert Grant was precisely that it focused on the cultural

dimension of design, not merely on business development."

The application process "demanded reflection, writing, and a coherent project proposal, ensuring that applicants could think critically about their work," according to Lamarre.

The research component of the grant strongly favoured the development of a deeper practice, attracting designers and studios that went beyond the commercial dimensions of the project. The experimentation/ research/ exploration component **anchored the award within a logic of design quality.**

Carreau maintains that the grant "had a cultural and civic dimension – it elevated design as part of Montréal's identity rather than as a commodity." He expressed regret that such programmes are increasingly rare, stating that "Montréal currently lacks initiatives that publicly champion design as a discipline with intrinsic cultural value, not just financial impacts."

The need to innovate is so central to design work but there is little space for research and experimentation in young practices that often are focused on getting a business off the ground. It is rarely possible to take a step back from the day-to-day without having external funding.

The project aspect of the grant was an **incentive for a very specific type of studio** and a deterrent for others. Those that had a

natural interest in research alongside practice were able to use the grant to undertake research they would have otherwise been unable to, given the financial and time constraints of client work. However, for practices less inclined to do research, the time investment necessary and the limited amount of the grant were not inducement enough to make it worthwhile to apply.

\$10,000 might not seem like much in 2025 but the winners of the grant all felt that, for the time, it was enough. Between 2008 and 2017, this sum would cover a plane ticket or tickets, and between a week and a month of travel. It was tight but sufficient to deliver the first stages of a real project.

It was noted, however, that it was not sufficient to develop a tangible outcome that would share the acquired knowledge with the greater community (for instance a conference, publication or exhibition).

These international exchanges, however small, offered a rare chance for designers and architects to benchmark and become familiar with international best practices and create the beginnings of an international network of peers. They also, according to Carreau, "sustained Montréal's links with global design networks."

Promotion and Visibility

The evaluation of the value of the promotional aspects of the grant were mixed. Not all of the winners felt that the promotion

had helped them. For some – Gao, for instance – the value of the promotion had been immense. In her case, the press release garnered her TV interviews, press in the local paper and eventually led to years of international press at the highest levels. For designers like Grenier, who were exploring new areas of design that were at the time nonexistent in Canada, the production of a short video explaining her work was useful to her showcase and explain what she was capable of doing to potential clients.

Some of the designers interviewed felt it was of little use or that it came too early; the publicity would have been more impactful once they had a completed project to promote. It seems that for the promotional strategy, the timing was very important. When the promotion could coincide with other news, it was possible to leverage the investment for a much higher return. This was the case for Rainville Sangaré, as was discussed earlier.

Creative Latitude

Andraos and Mongiat explained that what made the Phyllis Lambert Grant so special was that, unlike a traditional grant or subsidy, it functioned more like a prize. Rather than being tied to a specific deliverable, it recognized a design approach and a broader vision. This gave them an exceptional sense of freedom: they didn't feel obligated to produce a concrete outcome or a "successful final project." What mattered was presenting their process and intentions. They contrast this with receiving a subsidy, which typically

comes with significant pressure to execute exactly what was promised in the proposal—"the thing you said you'd do on page 42." In their view, the absence of such constraints was liberating and allowed for more authentic, exploratory work.

Execution

There seemed to be a consensus that the project had been **well-executed overall**. It was not any one factor of the above but rather the combination of all of them that contributed to the success of the grant.

Gao spoke with deep appreciation of Marie-Josée Lacroix, Commissioner of the *Bureau du design* and of the *Bureau* staff, calling Lacroix "very supportive both during and after the grant process." She stated that Lacroix's "involvement had amplified the award's impact and given it an authenticity that was rare in such programmes."

Carreau called the grant organization "impeccable" stating that "even fifteen years later, [he sees] it as an emblem of what design awards should be: public, cultural, and inspiring – celebrating not just projects, but the people and ideas that advance design as a collective civic endeavour."

Over the years, the *Bureau du design* refined almost every aspect of the prize, learning from the years before. It was this rigour, and the *Bureau's* persistence that the grant should benefit the community as a whole, that crafted a programme that has had a

lasting impact on the Montréal design community all these years later.

A Virtuous Spiral

The Phyllis Lambert Grant did not exist in a vacuum. The winners and applicants recounted their experiences with a whole host of subsidies, grants, residencies, internships, entrepreneurial support programmes and other opportunities that they were able to take advantage of to hone their skills, develop their practices and otherwise advance their careers. They often described the experience as **a chain, where one opportunity begot another** and, through the process, their success started to build.

Here are some of the other sources of support that they named within Canada:

Cabinet Créatif, an export support initiative from the City and Air Canada.

Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) [the Québec Council of Arts and Literature] Subsidies (various).

'Empreinte Québécoise' a Québec government programme matching manufacturers with designers.

INÉDI (Expertise et recherche en design industriel) A programme of the *Cégep de Terrebonne* funding expertise and research for Industrial Design.

La Piscine, an incubator in Montréal-based cultural and creative entrepreneurs.

McConnell Foundation (a private Canadian foundation).

Mentor M [now **Réseau Mentorat Montréal**] a mentoring service for entrepreneurs in Montréal.

Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC) [the Québec Society of Cultural Businesses] Subsidies (various)

Service d'Aide aux Jeunes Entreprises (SAJE) Montréal-based organisation that supports young entrepreneurs through business training.

8. Missed Opportunities

Despite their satisfaction with the process and results, most of the interviewees had opinions about how the process could be improved or opportunities that had been missed.

Sharing Project Outcomes

Part of the freedom of the programme was that it did not define the form of the final deliverable. In most cases a written report was produced explaining the research that had taken place. Only in one case – that of Sasseville – did the project end in a tangible collection. Lamarre, the first winner and a graphic designer, created a website to share his research more widely.

Grenier had produced a materials library as well as a report. She explained that “at the time, there had been some question of what the final form of the projects should be” and that her work, which she termed “intentionally experimental,” had produced a “research archive rather than commercial outcomes.”

Most of the laureates agreed that the funds were insufficient to allow for any real investment of time in the reporting or for any

public outcome (the publication of a book, the creation of an exhibition). Many lamented this, as they felt that the things they had learned and experienced could have been interesting to the greater design community and that **sharing would have extended the value of the prize from the laureates to the greater community.**

This happened informally in some cases – Sasseville was invited by Phyllis Lambert to present his experience, and later his glassware was purchased for the permanent collection of the *Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec* (MNBAQ) – but many felt that it was unfortunate that this process was not formalized.

While the grant funded travel and research, Carreau pointed out that it “did not necessarily enable the production of tangible work” adding that a “production-oriented component would have made the programme’s outcomes more visible and lasting.”

Looking back, Lacroix ventured that if she had to do it again, she “believed **the grant should include a structured and public form of knowledge-sharing**—through talks, short videos, workshops, or other formats—so that the next generation could benefit from the laureates’ experiences.”

Sustaining the community

Though informal connections were made within the group of winners, there was regret that this was not formalized and that the programme was not sustained long enough to **create links intergenerationally**. Grenier tellingly asked "Where are the emerging designers today? How do we connect to them?" Pelletier had had a similar reflection, noting his interest in keeping abreast of the work of young talent..

Lapalme also regretted not having a **mechanism that would identify new talent**. He explained that he was searching for "good graphic designers, interaction designers, strategic designers, speculative designers, service designers and others," and that he did not know where to start looking. "There isn't a place where you can flip through portfolios," he remarked.

Legast (*Audiotopie*) stated that they saw immense potential for transformation in extending the networks even wider, building bridges not just among designers but with the greater community of urban planners, architects and beyond. He explained that for small studios like his, "what matters most is not only funding but also connection – helping our unique expertise find its place within the wider world."

Sustaining International Networks

Grenier compared the situation in Iceland with that in Canada, noting how **little exchange there was between Montréal and other cities in Canada and the US**. She remarked that even if they were isolated, the community she met in Iceland still had strong relationships with all of Scandinavia, and exhibitions would travel, extending the reach of their work.

Perhaps *Atelier Barda* hint at a solution when they observe that "their international networks have had to do more with their research than their built work."

Leveraging Results: Promotion of Design

It was felt that more could have been done to leverage the good work that was produced for more of a mass-market understanding of the value of design and architecture. Lamarre reflected that what was needed was more "designers who have opinions, who believe in something, and who want to be a public voice." He explained that his "first mentor in design was Frédéric Metz at UQÀM. He was outspoken, he was in the media, he took positions. He participated in public debates (...) if we represent a profession that's obscure, that people don't understand the value of, it's not because people are unintelligent— it's because we're not explaining it well." He felt it was necessary that people like the group of laureates assume the "role of being a public figure, of having opinions, of popularizing the

profession, of showing the importance of design in society."

Sasseville expressed his disappointment that the available programmes did not take enough risks. He proposed that public procurement was a good way to support local industry, and specifically young designers. He noted the advances in design that were made during Expo 67 and the Montréal Olympics, stating that the designs that came out of these two events are, even today, among the most important accomplishments in design for Montréal. He quoted the writer Daniel Canty, who had stated that we live in the "future antérieur" (a play on the verb tense, saying that we live in the future of our past glories).

Gao noted that fashion remained largely excluded from cultural discourse: major publications devoted special issues to literature, visual art, or architecture, yet never to fashion or design. In her view, North American culture still undervalued these creative professions, failing to understand their intellectual and cultural significance.

Andraos (DTLJ) felt that "the sum of these initiatives had started to transform things. The status of 'City of Design' was something aspirational, and it was thanks to initiatives [like the Phyllis Lambert Grant] that we were starting to approach it. So when these initiatives ended, I found it really unfortunate, because we were only just starting to tap into their transformative potential."

Leveraging Results: Strategic Design

Within the pool of applicants, two of the five that did not win but went on to do important work were focused on the strategic dimensions of design. Both felt that they were excluded due to a lack of understanding of the power this application could have. This lack of outlet for undeniable talents – trained in elite schools and with recognized studios and think tanks— seems a missed opportunity for society in general. They did not suffer personally, but in adapting their careers to the environment rather than receiving a place to develop the environment for their tremendous skills, society has inevitably lost out.

Whereas in places like the UK and the Nordics, design is increasingly being positioned as a **driver of strategic and economic innovation**, here it remains relegated to "communication, objects, interiors, or architecture" (Lapalme). He also reflects on how systemic barriers in Québec's design culture have kept the field from evolving at the same pace as elsewhere. For Lapalme, the challenge remains how to "reposition design as a central force in tackling major social, ecological and economic issues, not just as an aesthetic or functional discipline."

9. Case Studies

Pelletier de Fontenay (2015 grant recipients)

Building a research-driven practice with international reach

Pelletier de Fontenay's trajectory as an architecture studio is inseparable from the research culture its founders developed while undertaking their Phyllis Lambert Grant-funded project. The co-founders met during graduate school and established a shared interest in the intellectual and conceptual dimensions of architectural practice. In the early years of their firm, most of their

commissions were modest — building permits, terrace designs, small residential extensions — projects that were highly pragmatic. Support from research grants — first from the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* CALQ [the Québec council of arts and literature] and then from the Phyllis Lambert Grant — created the conditions for them to articulate a methodology that still defines their work today.

The grant gave them space to think, experiment, and remain connected to the spirit of research they had cultivated in school.

Pelletier explains that the Phyllis Lambert Grant was particularly significant in helping them maintain that spirit. When they applied, they had just won the design competition for



Montréal
Insectarium
project by
Pelletier de
Fontenay (left
and right). Photo
Credit: James
Brittain.

Montréal's Insectarium, a project that deeply questioned what a natural history museum could be. Their research for the grant built directly from that experience. The project they proposed examined how architecture can host living ecosystems – plants, insects, animals – within built environments. They traveled to study greenhouses, zoological gardens, and museums across Europe, especially in Germany, exploring both historical and contemporary examples. The trip also deepened their collaboration with Kuehn Malvezzi the Berlin-based architects with whom they had partnered on the Insectarium project.

The two firms visited several sites together, comparing ideas and design approaches, using the fieldwork as a way to reflect critically on their ongoing project in Montréal. Traveling and engaging with architects abroad not only strengthened professional relationships but also allowed for a richer, more embodied understanding of architecture – especially in projects that rely on atmosphere, material, and sensory

experience, which can't be fully grasped through images.

The studio credits this research-intensive methodology as instrumental in shaping them into the kind of office that can compete successfully in architectural competitions in Canada and abroad.

Over time, the firm has grown steadily and sustainably. At the moment they received the Phyllis Lambert Grant, they employed four people; today the studio fluctuates between **15 and 20 employees**, reflecting a consistent expansion of their practice and portfolio. Their dual commitment to research and built work – a model more common in Europe than in Québec – has positioned them uniquely within the local landscape. The relationship they developed with the *Bureau du design* through not only the grant but winning competitions sponsored by that agency to create public works including a library and community centre that was completed in 2025.



The Phyllis Lambert Grant also served as an important early marker of prestige at the national level. While it did not bring direct commissions, it contributed significantly to the studio's visibility and credibility within cultural and architectural circles. This recognition became part of a longer chain of institutional validations: the Phyllis Lambert Grant helped them win the **Architectural League Prize in New York**, a highly respected international award. That accolade, in turn, strengthened their profile and was almost certainly a factor in their recent success in winning a major international competition to design a **new primary school in Louňovice (Czech Republic)**. Each achievement built on the last, gradually consolidating their position as an office capable of operating — intellectually and professionally — on an international stage.

Today, *Pelletier de Fontenay* is recognized as one of the rare Québec studios that balances conceptual research with professional practice. They continue to design, publish, and compete internationally, working within a methodological framework that traces directly back to the research conditions enabled by the Phyllis Lambert Grant — the moment, they say, when they first had permission “to stop, think, and imagine,” and to become the kind of studio they aspired to be.

Daily tous les jours (2010 grant recipients)

Redefining urban experiences through design, technology, and play

Melissa Mongiat and Mouna Andraos do not come from traditional design backgrounds. Mongiat commenced her studies with a bachelors in Graphic Design and completed her Masters in Narrative Environments at Central Saint Martins. She remained in London after her schooling, where she co-founded several start-ups, including a creative research lab, and completed award-winning public art projects with the *Southbank Centre*, a major arts complex on London's South Bank. After a bachelors in communications and liberal arts, Andraos completed her Masters in Interactive Telecommunication at NYU in New York, and remained there, working as a researcher and interactive designer, developing interactive urban projects rooted in the social potential of technology.

When Mongiat and Andraos applied for the Phyllis Lambert Grant, they were at a pivotal moment: **both founders were returning to Montréal after promising career débuts abroad** and were just beginning to collaborate formally together. Each brought an international outlook and early career

momentum – and together, they chose to build something new in Montréal, a place where experimentation and freedom were still possible.

Their emerging practice focused on a field of design that barely existed at the time: **civic-scale interactive installations blending urban design, music, technology, and experience design**. Their work invites the public to play, participate, and co-create the city. Over more than a decade, their installations – from small prototypes to now-iconic pieces like the *Musical Swings* – have contributed meaningfully to how Montréalers experience and enjoy their city. Today, their studio, *Daily tous les jours* (a play on the bilingualism of Montréal, it literally would be translated to “daily every day”) is recognized as one of the studios that has helped define Montréal's identity as a place for design-led civic experimentation.

The Phyllis Lambert Grant played a key role in their early trajectory. Not only did it give them a much-needed cash injection (they joked that it was like a ‘line of credit’ for their first year of operation, until they were able to undertake the grant project trip) but it provided credibility at a crucial moment – before their studio had a formal name, portfolio, or financial stability. The grant enabled them to undertake a research residency in Berlin, where they immersed themselves in ‘maker’ culture and urban experimentation. That period of open-ended exploration became foundational to their methodology. The way *Daily tous les jours* still works today – combining research, prototyping, and participatory experimentation – was shaped directly by that early Phyllis Lambert Grant-funded research trip.

As women founders operating in a field still overwhelmingly dominated by men, their success has been exceptional not only

Spaghetti Chorus
National Gallery of
Canada (Ottawa) by *Daily*
tous les jours. Photo
Credit Maryn Devine.





(L) Daydreamer, North Carolina Museum of Art (Courtesy of Daily tous les jours) (R) Hello, Hello, Gaslight District, Cambridge, CA (Photo Credit: doublespace)

locally but internationally. Today, 65% of their business comes from outside Canada. Their work has appeared in major outlets including *Monocle*, *The New York Times*, and *Vogue*. They have won major recognitions such as the *Fast Company Innovation by Design Award*, published a book, and seen their installations acquired by museums, foundations, and municipalities around the world.

Their trajectory demonstrates how an early boost of institutional recognition – especially one as symbolic as the Phyllis Lambert Grant – can meaningfully support designers working in emerging, cross-disciplinary fields.

For *Daily tous les jours* the Phyllis Lambert Grant was both a launching pad and an anchor. It gave them visibility and legitimacy at a moment when their practice was still experimental and unconventional. It also

played a part in their decision to remain in Montréal, contributing to the city's design momentum rather than relocating abroad. Over time, their work has not only grown internationally but has left a lasting imprint on Montréal's public life – embodying the city's values of creativity, participation, and inclusion.

Ying Gao (2009 grant recipient)

Breaking the boundaries of fashion design through material and technological innovation

When Montréal-based fashion designer and educator Ying Gao received the Phyllis Lambert Grant, she was already navigating a demanding dual career: full-time professor at UQÀM and founder of her own studio practice under her own name. With degrees from Geneva's *Haute École des Arts Appliqués* and the *Université du Québec à Montréal* (UQÀM), she had built a practice grounded in research, experimentation, and cultural inquiry. The work she was producing was getting noticed, being shown in Museums in Europe and North America, but fashion design was not getting the recognition it deserved within design circles in Canada. Gao applied for the award in part to highlight a discipline she felt was undervalued.

The Phyllis Lambert Grant funded a research project with elements in Berlin (Germany) and Nagoya (Japan). It was in Nagoya that she encountered what would become a pivotal material in her career: an ultralight, innovative textile later known internationally as 'super organza'. Discovering this advanced Japanese material—and the philosophy of precision and innovation behind it— was

revelatory. The experience was not just inspiring; it was foundational. She **forged relationships with Japanese manufacturers** that have lasted almost two decades, continuing to source the same textile for her collections. She later observed that Prada adopted the material she had been exploring since its early development.

Of the years after receiving the grant she described "they were wild years: exhibitions, production, acquisitions, and it still continues (...). It is very exciting, very encouraging (...). Is it really only thanks to that grant ...

Objectively speaking, for me as a designer, when I received that recognition, maybe it gave me an extra push ... a validation (...). I realize that it really encouraged me to move forward with all the projects I would not have had the courage to bring to life otherwise."

During this period, **Gao also became a frequent international lecturer**, sharing insights at the intersection of material innovation, technology, and fashion culture. She has given talks at the *Design Academy Eindhoven* (Netherlands), *ModeMuseum, Musée de la mode d'Anvers* (Belgium), *École Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle de Paris* (France), and the *International Imagen Festival* (Colombia).

For over twenty years, with significant personal commitment, Gao has devoted herself to teaching in parallel to her practice. Devoting a large portion of her working life to teaching — balancing demanding academic responsibilities with the development of her own work — she has **shaped generations of**

Image: Courtesy of the Textile Museum of Canada.



designers. The students she has formed have benefitted from her unique cross-cultural perspective and the global research that informs her practice.

Though Gao believes she would have pursued the path that she did regardless, she is unequivocal about the grant's impact. The award acted as a catalyst—accelerating her trajectory, expanding her network, and giving her the confidence to pursue ambitious projects. It also delivered relational value: an enduring association with Phyllis Lambert herself, whose continued support and encouragement remains a source of pride.

The prestige of the Phyllis Lambert Grant — and the promotional investment included in prize, which was given at the most opportune moment for her career— opened doors at a time before social media. Traditional press

coverage was strong, raising her profile locally and abroad. In the years that followed, her work appeared in major museum exhibitions and design platforms worldwide, including (but not limited to):

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND
(EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND)

MAK VIENNA: AUSTRIAN MUSEUM OF APPLIED ARTS (VIENNA, AUSTRIA)
MUSÉE DE DESIGN ET D'ARTS APPLIQUÉS

CONTEMPORAINS (LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND)

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON (BOSTON, USA)

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF CRAFT AND DESIGN (SAN FRANCISCO, USA)

CITÉ DES SCIENCES (PARIS, FRANCE)

THE NATIONAL DESIGN AND CRAFT GALLERY (KILKENNY, IRELAND)

SEOUL MUSEUM OF ART (SEMA) (SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA)

KENTUCKY MUSEUM OF ART AND CRAFT (LOUISVILLE, USA)

HANGARAM DESIGN MUSEUM (SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA)

MUSEUM BELLERIVE (ZÜRICH, SWITZERLAND)

SHANGHAI SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY MUSEUM (SHANGHAI, CHINA)

THE VENICE BIENNALE (VENICE, ITALY)

Full list here (<http://yinggao.ca/info/exhibitions-and-shows/>)

Today, Gao is recognized globally as a designer of exceptional skill. The know-how and relationships she developed in Japan sixteen years ago, continue to figure prominently in her work, which is exhibited globally, and held in the permanent collections of several museums. Gao's work has been featured in Dezeen, VOGUE, Elle, Azure, The New York Times, Fast Company and In Style.

Her work is held in the permanent collection of several Canadian Museums including:

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY (ACQUIRED 2023)

MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS (ACQUIRED 2020)

MUSÉE DE LA CIVILISATION DE QUÉBEC (ACQUIRED 2014)



Gao's work exhibited at the Textile Museum (top left) the Museum of Craft and Design (top right). Bottom right, Science is Fiction, a collection in medical-grade latex (Images this page courtesy of Ying Gao.

Learnings

From the interviews, emerged a framework for looking at design support and the role of designers in society. These are not impacts or even strictly related to the grant, but understanding these notions helps to frame the issue more widely.

Design as a Cultural Asset

There are two different cultures among the interviewees when it comes to grant-funding. One is the more free-market view that one should “pull oneself up by the bootstraps,” known as ‘hustle culture’ that views design as a business and maintains that one should get ahead based on struggle and sacrifice. The second, more European view, is that culture is a societal good that the government should invest in for the common good. In the second view, producers of culture see themselves as doing something that has a civic motivation and that their explorations have a purpose beyond themselves.

Perhaps Rainville encapsulated this idea best. “It helped me see his work within a broader continuum of designers and makers who shape culture through material practice.” For him, “the true value of the experience lay in its

intellectual and personal impact — in realizing that, even in a small market like Québec, it is possible to create meaning, culture, and beauty through design that connects people, materials, and place.”

Fostering the Emergence of Talent

If one did want to support the emergence of young talents, it is important to create spaces for them to be recognized and given opportunities. For Combelle and Di Bacco, grants and research awards have a “democratizing function” in architecture. “They level the playing field.” Without such support, “independent research would be reserved for those with family wealth or institutional positions. A grant generates equity.” The investment in a research practice can erase a debt in social, familial capital. “It would be easier to do research without the financial risk” they observe. The value of the grants is the democratic dimension — giving a chance to young studios with no network or connections, only talent and hard work.

This is even more so for architecture and design competitions that are anonymous, as it allows the work to speak rather than the reputation. This pits talent against talent rather than experience against established reputation.

Harnessing Intellectual Assets

A society can and should benefit from the energy and ambition of young practitioners. Rather than seeing these awards only as a support for the design community, it is

possible to see them as a way to tap into a knowledge base for the common good.

Dorsey proposes that we should be aiming not just to support young practices but to "support a cultural shift that ultimately supports younger practice by **building recognition for the value of their contribution.**" Practitioners at that age – the 30- to 40- year olds – represent a "very powerful force." This cohort should be seen as a unique intellectual asset. She asserts that a seat at the table –whether it is discussions centred on renewable energy planning, or policy initiatives – harnesses "the type of optimism and energy they have and the intelligence they carry."

10. Concluding Remarks

This impact assessment demonstrates that the Phyllis Lambert Grant was a sound public investment, producing outcomes whose scale and durability significantly exceeded the programme's modest financial cost.

The *Bureau du design* took the position early on that the grant should not only pay homage to a public figure who had contributed immensely to the city and to the global design and architecture communities, but that **it should contribute more widely to the Montréal design community.**

Public institutions, Lacroix argued, **have a responsibility to take risks that the private sector would not.** Awarding a prize to someone already established is easy; anyone could do that. The public sector's role is to identify and support those who are promising but not yet so visible.

Rather than operating as a one-time subsidy, the grant acted as a strategic intervention at **a critical moment in designers' careers**, when relatively small amounts of support could yield outsized, long-term effects. Many recipients reported that the grant shaped not only immediate opportunities, but also their

long-term methodologies, business models, and positioning—effects that continued well beyond the funded period.

Though the grant had important career impacts for all the designers who received it, perhaps one of the most important legacies of this grant are the **design studios that it helped get off the ground.**

One of the grant applicants, Raphaël Daudelin (co-founder of *Studio Feed*) shared with us the unique challenges of founders of design studios including finding resources to help support business decision-making specific to the creative sector and the need for resources to better manage practical aspects of the business like “managing workflow” and pitching work.

Internships and graduation awards are “great for those who want to join established studios, but there's little equivalent for those who want to start their own,” reflected Daudelin.

“For those that want to start their own business. — and **we need them because, as people retire, we need new studios** — a grant like this helps. We might not know where the award is being noticed but *it is being noticed*. For **those who have the initiative to start a business so early on in their career, they should be encouraged.** That is missing now. Being recognized for that initiative is

precious.” He pointed out that many recipients of the Phyllis Lambert Grant did go on to establish their own studios.

The programme also played a meaningful role in reinforcing Montréal’s greater design ecosystem. It played a role in **keeping a generation of promising young designers in Montréal**, as young talent abroad found in the prize the symbol of an evolution of the opportunities available to designers and committed themselves to making a go of it at home.

The grant created a rallying point for the local community. Not only did it create a peer group for the winners, who went on to support and collaborate with each other, but with every addition to the circle of past winners the connections fanning out to the rest of the community grew. Every year events surrounding the grant – the jury deliberations, grant reception – provided **further opportunities to build and reinforce connections** between jury members, the designer community, *Bureau* staff and City elected officials and connected organisations like the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the universities and international organisations in Montréal (the World Design Organization and the International Council of Design).

With the UNESCO connection, the grant **reinforced Montréal’s international networks**. Montréal’s reputation as a design city was supported by cultivating a generation of designers who acted as ambassadors in global networks, exhibitions, winning global awards, and participating in professional

exchanges. These designers helped translate Montréal’s UNESCO City of Design designation into concrete cultural capital, strengthening Canada’s visibility within the international design community..

The grant’s impact percolated into the city in ways that could be enjoyed by all. Grant recipients went on to contribute to public institutions, cultural projects, and the urban environment, often applying research-driven approaches that elevated the quality and cultural impact of the built environment. In this sense, the Phyllis Lambert Grant not only supported individual careers, but also indirectly enriched the city’s architectural culture and the enjoyment of public spaces.

The grant enjoyed a tremendous reputation among the local design community, who perceived that it had **gravitas and rigour**.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the Phyllis Lambert Grant’s value lies not in direct economic returns alone, but in its ability to activate talent, retain cultural capital, and reinforce the long-term resilience and international standing of Montréal’s design sector. As such, the grant offers a compelling model of how relatively limited public investment—when strategically planned and executed with rigour—can generate sustained cultural, professional, and civic benefits.

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Appendix 1

Methodology

1.1 Assessment Objectives

Through a process of qualitative interviews, this assessment is meant to evaluate how the Phyllis Lambert Grant impacted the career trajectories of the winners, their capacity to grow successful businesses, how this impacted the reputation of Canadian design abroad (their visibility internationally), and how this impacted their export capacity.

In addition to looking backwards at the experiences of the winners, we also aim to provide an analysis of how the grant programme worked, and to analyse which aspects were more or less effective.

1.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection was qualitative. In-depth interviews were conducted with a selection of grant winners, applicants (who did not win), contest organizers, and a jury member. A full list of interviewees can be found in Appendix 02.

The interviews were mostly held in French. They were recorded, transcribed and then

translated using AI software with human oversight.

2.2 Sampling Rationale

Because the sample was small to begin with (only 9 winners), interviews were undertaken with all of the winners. In cases where the winners were a duo, some of the interviews were held together and some separate. In all cases at least one, if not both, of the winning parties were interviewed.

In addition to the winners a subset of non-winners (comparison group) was interviewed. Five applicants who had been unsuccessful were selected from among a list of 56 applicants⁴ from all nine competitions. In an effort to compare like studios – the applicants who were selected to be interviewed were from among those who had successfully opened design studios or businesses that had achieved success in their own right. Of the six approached to be interviewed, five accepted.

When the interviews with the winners had been completed, it became apparent that there could be unintended impacts for the grant organizers. In order to better understand the intention of the prize, how it was organised and some of the impacts on the granting body itself, the head of the *Bureau du design* (during the period of the grant) was interviewed as well as the project manager in charge of the programme.

⁴ 'applicants' in this case can be a single person or duo, are counted only once (even if they applied various times) and do not count winners, though many were applicants the years before winning

Lastly, in an effort to understand the selection process, a jury member was interviewed.

2.3 Limitations

Despite interviewing at least one person from each winning team, there is still bound to be some element of response bias. In some cases only one member of the team was interviewed and it is clear from interviewing various duos that often the two members of the same team have a different impression of the results.

As we have no real way to compare what would have happened had the teams not won the grant, and are basing ourselves on the impressions of the winners and non-winners, there is inevitably some degree of self-reporting bias. In fact, quite often the interviewees would report in the same breath all the things that they learned and access they received and how it changed their careers and methodologies, and still assess that it had very little impact on their success.

Perhaps tellingly, of the five applicants (non-winners) interviewed, one had won a similar prize in France prior to immigrating to Canada and two had benefitted from another early career award/internship programme hosted by a local ad agency. Thus, in this sense, it is difficult to fully distinguish between winners and applicants.

Appendix 2

Interviewees

Philippe Lamarre (2008 Winner)
Ying Gao (2009 Winner)
Mouna Andraos (2010 Winner)
Melissa Mongiat (2010 Winner)
Guillaume Sasseville (2011 Winner)
Eugénie Manseau (2012 Winner)
Philippe Carreau (2012 Winner)
Étienne Legast (2013 Winner)
Simone D'Ambrosio (*Audiotopie*)
Yannick Guéguen (2013 Winner)
Émilie F. Grenier (2014 Winner)
Hubert Pelletier (2015 Winner)
Nicholas Sangaré (2017 Winner)
Lambert Rainville (2017 Winner)
Raphaël Daudelin (2009 Applicant)
Talia Dorsey (2013 Applicant)
Jonathan Lapalme (2015 Applicant)
Cécile Combelle (2017 Applicant)
Antonio Di Bacco (2017 Applicant)
Justin Lortie (2017 Applicant)
Marie-Josée Lacroix (*Bureau du design*)
Stéphanie Jecrois (*Bureau du design*)
Louis-Charles Lasnier (Jury 2011)

Appendix 3

Juries

2009

The jury consisted of Giovanna Borasi, Curator of Contemporary Architecture at the CCA; Benoit Dupuis, Partner Architect with ACDF; Angela Grauerholz, Director of the UQÀM Design Centre; Marie-Josée Lacroix, Director of Design Montréal; and Mario Masson, Division Chief with the Ville de Montréal's Department of Large Parks and Nature in the City.

2010

Béatrice Carabin, Commissioner in the Design Montréal office of the Ville de Montréal, Jean-Robert Choquet, Cultural Development Director of the Ville de Montréal, Randy Cohen, an architect with Atelier Big City, and Daria Der Kaloustian, Senior Co-ordinator, Publications, at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA).

2011

Fabrizio Gallanti, Associate Director, Programs, Canadian Centre for Architecture;

Frédéric Gauthier, Founder, Les Éditions de la Pastèque; Manuela Goya, Secretary-General, Montréal, Cultural Metropolis; **Louis-Charles Lasnier, graphic designer and Founder of Atelier Louis-Charles Lasnier;** Jean-Pierre LeTourneux, architect and partner, Menkès Shooner Dagenais LeTourneux Architectes.

2012

Mélanie Baillargé, Artistic Director, Nolin BBDO; Éric Daoust, Associate Architect, Bosses Design; Albert Ferré, Publications Director, Canadian Centre for Architecture; Pierre Fortin, General Director, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles; Francyne Lord, Section Head, Bureau d'art public, Ville de Montréal.

2013

Martin Houle, Architect and Founding Director, Kollektif.net; Mario Mercier, Partner and Creative Director, orangetango; Émilie Retailleau, Curatorial Co-ordinator, Canadian Centre for Architecture; Gilles Saucier, Partner and Architect, Saucier + Perrotte; and

Nancy Shoiry, Senior Director, Service de la mise en valeur du territoire, Ville de Montréal.

Landscape and Environmental Design at Université de Montréal; Michèle Picard, Section Head, Équipements culturels, art public et patrimoine artistique, Service de la culture, Ville de Montréal.

2014

Georges Labreque, Project Manager at the Centre de design de l'UQÀM. Giovanna Borasi, Chief Curator, Canadian Centre for Architecture; Diane Charbonneau, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Decorative Arts, Montréal Museum of Fine Arts; Maxime-Alexis Frappier, Partner and President, ACDF* Architecture; and Stéphane Ricci, Assistant to the Director and Co-ordinator, Quartier des spectacles, Ville de Montréal.

2015

Francis Brisebois, industrial designer and Corporate Advisor – Wayfinding, Société de transport de Montréal, Manon Asselin, architect and co-founder, Atelier TAG; Annie Lebel, architect, in situ atelier d'architecture; Benoit Gérard, partner and designer, Blazysgerard; and Andrew Goodhouse, writer, Canadian Centre for Architecture.

2017

Rami Bebawi, Partner and Co-founder, KANVA Cindy Couture, General Manager and Partner, Index-Design; Caroline Gagnon, PhD, Professor and Director of the Product Design Program, School of Design, Université Laval; Patrick Marmen, Researcher, Chair in

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