

## From protests to poutine, ABC:MTL introduces the city

The Canadian Centre for Architecture presents a multifaceted, mixed-media portrait of Montreal

Written by: [Lauren Wray](#) Posted date: November 19, 2012



A selection of publicly generated images portray Montreal's dynamic nature in CCA's latest project. (journalmetro.com)

There are the usual famous attractions—the view from Mount Royal, a stroll through Old Port, the obligatory late night poutine. Yet Montreal is a city of multiplicities that extend beyond its tourist tropes. The Canadian Centre for Architecture's (CCA) newest project, *ABC: MTL*, offers an invitation to the deeper realities of Montreal.

While previous exhibitions at the CCA have focused on the city as an historical artifact, *ABC:MTL* speaks of Montreal as it is today—an evolving urban hub composed of various styles, structures, and social landscapes.

To meaningfully capture the nature of the metropolis, the CCA launched an open call for submissions in June 2012. Public submissions served as an integral feature in creating a comprehensive narrative that matched the CCA's pluralistic vision.

Curator Fabrizio Gallanti notes that “for us, this is a form of democracy: the identity of one site is not the privilege of a few, but rather a perpetually unstable condition that is the result of a real polyphony of voices.” This perspective results in an exhibit from the everyman's point of view, outside of the traditional top-down approach associated with urban space.

Out of 250 proposals, 90 contributions will be presented over the course of the project, which runs until March 2013. This longevity allows for ongoing submissions to accurately represent a city in flux. However, not all the submissions are new. Some works have been previously included in other galleries. Gallanti explains that *ABC:MTL* is “not obsessed with originality,” but rather concerned with how well the works describe the city today.

Videos, photos, architectural mock-ups, lectures, and performances constitute the first installment of the project, on view until the end of January. Together, they result in a mixture of media depicting the city's most indelible impressions. The works touch upon both the abstract and physical elements of Montreal —the ephemeral hums and buzzes of daily life, the fleeting moments the metropolis holds, and the people, buildings, and places that define the present-day city.

The pieces range from immigrant interviews to cell-phone photography. Overall, the works remind us that Montreal is more than a city defined by numbers; it is its own unique entity with its own metabolism, heart, and life.

With the breadth of formats, the term ‘exhibition’ may be a misnomer. Instead, *ABC:MTL* is a fully engaging experience. It is not a fixed exhibition, but an ongoing project with changing content. Public participation, lectures, and performances are equally valuable and relevant to the main

gallery showing. An online component features all 250 works submitted, including a map that pinpoints the locations of the projects to promote city exploration. The complete project, therefore, encourages interaction and participation on all levels.

Discussion is also an important ingredient. Amidst the student protests of last year, the question of Montreal's identity was thrown into the spotlight. *ABC: MTL* comes at a pertinent time of questioning who and what makes up its population.

"There was a high level of engagement, no matter what side people were on," Gallanti notes.

*ABC:MTL* profits from this recent engagement, asking its audience to partake in self-reflection, conversation, and discussion. It's a worthwhile visit; if not for its interesting aesthetic, historical and social qualities, then at least for inspiration. After all, they're still accepting submissions.

*ABC:MTL is showing at the CCA (1920 rue Baille). Public programs are mainly held on Thursday nights and weekends, with guided tours every Thursday at 5:30 p.m. (English) and 6:00 p.m. (French). Free admission for students.*