



# Montréal: World Capital of Digital Art and Creativity

## Declaration

Culture Montréal,  
Digital Montréal Committee

# Preamble

Montréal has an enviable position as an international leader in digital art and creativity, particularly in interdisciplinary and independent digital art, video games, immersion, virtual and augmented reality, visual effects, interactive documentary and participative installations in public spaces. This leadership is growing in breadth and depth through important work in artificial intelligence (AI), a sector in which Montréal is clearly the new world leader.

## **Given that**

On June 13, the Ville de Montréal City Council unanimously adopted its 2017-2022 Cultural Development Policy, objective 14.8 of which is to *“Confirm Montréal’s position as one of the world leaders in digital creativity by 2020.”* The two resulting priorities read as follows:

- *“Stimulate and support sectors that emerge from digital creativity.”*
- *“By 2020, help create a flagship event that promotes the visibility of actors in the sector.”*

## **Culture Montréal’s digital committee proposes**

Bringing together stakeholders from the digital art and creativity ecosystem, i.e., artists, creators, researchers, entrepreneurs and industry and institutional representatives, to become engaged in this effort.

**We, the members of the digital art and creativity community**, would like to have recognized the contribution of all areas of our ecosystem to the city’s cultural, social and economic development, while respecting what distinguishes us, **to be able to clearly and unequivocally claim Montréal’s status as world capital of digital art and creativity.**

## **We have identified three main objectives:**


1. Promote dialogue, connections and collaboration between artistic, entrepreneurial, industrial and scientific communities involved in digital creativity.
2. Foster public exposure to local digital cultural expression.
3. Help establish and promote Montréal as a world capital of digital art and creativity.



# Declaration

## **Current situation**

- We, the members of the digital art and creativity community, offer the following five observations:
  1. Montréal has an enviable position as an international leader in digital art and creativity.
  2. This leading position is the result of five major assets:
    - the many talented artists and creators recognized by their own international communities
    - bold, visionary leaders, entrepreneurs and investors
    - innovative university teams, a high-calibre, diversified educational environment
    - curious citizens who form a receptive audience
    - political decisions that promote its development
  3. The vitality of the digital arts and creativity communities is not sufficiently familiar to the general public or sufficiently understood by decision makers; we need new approaches to increase local visibility and strengthen international exposure.
  4. Too often, digital sectors operate in silos when it comes to management and operations. There should be better cohesion and synergy among artists, creators, entrepreneurs, researchers and decision makers, allowing them to join forces and become a vehicle for innovation in digital creativity.
  5. However, a range of initiatives have emerged in recent years to promote knowledge sharing among different sectors of digital art and creativity. These initiatives help players network and reach the public, but we must work to enrich and consolidate them.

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- We, the members of the digital art and creativity community, intend to mobilize and come together as widely as possible by leveraging our strengths, to support and increase our local presence and international visibility.

**As a result:**

1. We would like to **CONSOLIDATE** and coordinate our strengths to keep increasing the number of venues for meeting and networking among different players in digital culture.
2. We would like to harness the **MOMENTUM** of cultural policies and action plans adopted by the three levels of government, specifically:
  - a. The action plan that will be released in the next few weeks by the Ville de Montréal to identify concrete responses to the 2017-2022 Cultural Development Policy, objective 14.8 of which is to *“Confirm Montréal’s position as one of the world leaders in digital creativity by 2020.”*
  - b. The action plan that will be tabled in fall 2017 by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, in response to Québec’s new Cultural Policy.
  - c. Certain aspects of the policy announced at the end of September 2017 by Canadian Heritage, entitled Creative Canada, particularly with respect to creative hubs.
3. We would like to create an **ACTION PLAN** to reinforce the identity of Montréal, world capital of digital art and creativity, which could involve the creation of a cluster. This plan will be developed during a minimum of four meetings over the next 12 months, in the form of workshops at existing events, such as HUB Montréal in November 2017, the Phi Centre in winter 2018 and MUTEK\_IMG in April 2018 in cooperation with Montreal Digital Spring. The objective of the first meeting, scheduled for November 14, 2017 at HUB Montréal, is to identify and group problems in each sector.
4. We intend to adopt **MEANS** of communication to reach both our communities and different audiences, to fuel the passion for local digital cultural expression. The means of communication have yet to be defined and may piggyback on existing ones, such as newsletters, Facebook groups, joint Twitter accounts, creating a wiki and podcasts of strategic meetings..
5. We intend to increase our **VISIBILITY** by participating in more export missions and foreign representations, to provide international exposure for our creative output.

These efforts will take place within an existing ecosystem: attendance at industry events, collaboration with existing movements, strengthening collaborative efforts and partnerships, and initiatives to create new ties, increase the representation of different communities and create more dialogue between sectors. Every cultural sector should reap the benefits of such an effort, which will take place against a backdrop of receptiveness, sharing and support.

We are **Montréal: Capital of Digital Art and Creativity!**

# Background

## Pioneers

Beginning with Expo 67, Montréal was fertile ground for experimentation in what would eventually become multimedia. The city was already showing clear signs of vision and multidisciplinary in experimenting with technology to generate creations that reached different audiences. In the mid-1990s, as the general public began to adopt the Internet, the explosion of new technologies and the accessibility of technical means were game changers for all of society, from the public to creators.

In the wake of this groundswell, the first organizations dedicated to digital creation were born. In 1995, Montréal hosted the sixth symposium of the Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts (ISEA), out of which grew the Society for Arts and Technology (SAT). The SAT, known for the development of immersive technologies, plays a dual role: it is an artist centre and digital era research centre. Next came the Daniel Langlois Foundation, the Festival du nouveau cinéma et des nouveaux médias' Media Lounge, MUTEK and Elektra. From OBORO to the TOPO, from Studio XX to Perte de Signal, from Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon (4d Art) to Réalisations, research and creation centres kept popping up.

As early as 2005, Montréal was already recognized as one of the leading international sites for digital arts. The Ville de Montréal's Cultural Development Policy identified Montréal as a world leader in what was then called "cyberculture."

In January 2007, the Ville de Montréal, in partnership with the Conseil des arts de Montréal, published a 35-page document: *Les arts numériques à Montréal: le capital de l'avenir* (the digital arts in Montréal: the capital of the future). Intended to raise awareness among decision makers about the outlook and issues for digital creation, the document concluded as follows:

*"Montréal has what it takes to reach great heights: a critical mass of artists and artisans, incredible advances in technology, a stimulating creative climate, knowledgeable foundations and research chairs, dynamic, flexible organizations and visionary business leaders. But to maintain and reinforce this position, we need to go further. And by increasing the sector's visibility through a number of base-building initiatives (...), Montréal will justifiably be seen as a universal city, open to creation and innovation. The speed with which we act in this area will give us a unique opportunity: to anticipate the future, to think big and to aim high, as the city so often has."*



## Explorers

There has been a technology revolution in recent years with the appearance of smartphone touch-screen interfaces and the creation of Facebook and Twitter. Up to that point, we knew that digital technology had a place in our world. But today, digital technology is part of our daily lives, at the centre of a powerful world where networking is increasingly the norm for content interaction. Whether intentionally or not, we have all become digital culture explorers.

Adapting to this new reality, Montréal quickly assumed world leadership in a number of sectors, including in disciplines of digital arts, new narrativity, video games (VR, AR, serious game, marketing, art), immersion, virtual and augmented reality, visual effects, interactive experiences in public spaces and artificial intelligence.

In video games alone, we no longer simply supply creative labour to major international studios. Over 150 local, independent companies are testimony to how this environment is thriving.

Independent creation now exists alongside an entertainment industry comprised of private companies and institutions. Montréal also has a dynamic startup scene, particularly in video games and mobile applications. New models of financing have been created with investors, incubators and knowledge-sharing events and sites. Digital creation has made its way to the public space, reaching a wider audience. The ecosystem is complex and rich; there are a growing number of interdependencies, but what distinguishes each player remains intact. From creation in artist centres to research in institutions, from small video game developers to major technology companies, each in their own way and with their own audience, the different settings and actors are bursting with ideas locally and shining internationally.

While there is a dynamic climate in Montréal that is making itself felt beyond our borders, Montréal and Québec digital creation and creativity are still a well-kept secret. For the general public and for most decision makers and influencers, Céline Dion, Cirque du Soleil and Arcade Fire have made their mark at home and abroad. Digital Montréal is familiar to specialists, and the global impact of its artists, industries and institutions is underestimated.



## Today

A few names — artists such as Rafael Lozano-Hammer and Vincent Morisset, and studios such as Moment Factory and Daily tous les jours (Mélicca Mongiat and Mouna Andraos) — have emerged, propelled by their public installations and supported by institutions such as the Musée d'art contemporain, the NFB and the Quartier des spectacles Partnership. Events such as the International Digital Art Biennial (BIAN) and the Sight+Sound festival (Eastern Bloc) have taken their place in the digital art ecosystem. Major projects such as Cité Mémoire (Lemieux Pilon 4d Art) and those launched as part of Montréal's 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Jacques Cartier Bridge, Avudo, Pointe-à-Callière, KM3) have made their mark. The game, animation and visual effects industries and Hybride and Rodeo FX hold strong power of attraction.

Things are happening in the digital art and creativity communities; alliances are being created and networking is being done: the Conseil des arts de Montréal Composite evenings, CQAM (Conseil québécois des arts médiatiques) artist in residence program at Turbulent, MUTEK\_IMG, Digital Spring, not to mention the many trade shows, particularly at the SAT and the Phi Centre.

Montréal has a growing number of wide-ranging initiatives to promote digital creativity, notably the most recent, HUB-MTL: "In November 2017, a number of creative ecosystems will converge on HUB v1.0: virtual and augmented reality, sound and visual effects, video games, music, multimedia (interactive, immersive), branding and digital arts."

It would be of benefit to channel these initiatives by embracing all forms of digital cultural expression (performances, installations, web experiences, mobile apps, public interventions, games, connected objects), regardless of the channel they emerge from (artist centres, incubators, agencies, collectives, companies). The objective is not to create a mishmash, but to understand and respect each one's particularities, while working toward a common goal: making sure [Montréal is recognized as the world capital of digital art and creativity](#).

Additionally, too often sectors operate in silos, whether in terms of how they are financed or their niche: artist centres with artist centres, games with games, the web with the web... We need to break down these silos to create a climate of solidarity and cooperation between larger and smaller players and between the different links in the value chain. While emerging artists sometimes experience financial precariousness, institutions and medium and large players are writing a new chapter in the Montréal economy. The missions and priorities are different, but there are common objectives among the digital art and creativity communities: exposure, recognition, development and more meaningful encounters among players and with the public. It is in everyone's interest to create intersections that benefit all sectors, by sharing knowledge and expertise, with a better understanding of each other's issues.



## Tomorrow

It is essential to continue the collaborative process among digital artists, creators, thinkers, designers, programmers, entrepreneurs and investors. As part of this process, we will work on a joint action plan during 2017-2018. Political momentum will facilitate this effort.

It is time to propose a strategic partnership with the Ville de Montréal to *confirm Montréal's position as one of the world leaders in digital creativity by 2020* and to propose measures to *stimulate and support sectors that emerge from digital creativity*.

It is time to ensure that the governments of Québec and Canada, in their orientation documents and action plans, are moving in the same direction, in the interest of all our communities.

**It is also time for the members of the digital art and creativity community to agree on what is required to pursue our growth, at home and abroad.**



# **Members of the Digital Montréal Committee**

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### **Add your voice to the Declaration**

 Montréal: World Capital of Digital Art and Creativity

### **About Culture Montréal**

Culture Montréal is a non-profit, independent and non-partisan organization that brings together citizens who recognize the fundamental role of culture in the city's development. Culture Montréal is a place for reflection, dialogue and action, and its mission is to make culture one of the pillars of Montréal's development. The organization is recognized as a Conseil régional de la culture by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications.

### **About the Digital Montréal Committee**

With the goal of using collective intelligence as the basis for Culture Montréal's efforts, four standing committees have been created for reflection, to issue opinions and to propose structuring projects. The mandate of the Digital Montréal Committee is to rally and mobilize the driving forces of the digital, artistic, entrepreneurial and industrial worlds, to achieve consensus on the importance of recognizing Montréal as a digital city and to develop a work program to accomplish this.