

Julien Hébert and the Emergence of Industrial Design in Canada

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Introduction: Julien Hébert, A Pioneer of Design in Canada

Julien Hébert (1917–1994) is recognized by many as the father of industrial design in Quebec and in Canada. Most of the designers who worked with him or had him as a professor consider him a master and a mentor. Hébert played a key role in the evolution of the design field in Canada and, more specifically, in the French-speaking province of Quebec. After a brief presentation of his career, we will concentrate on issues such as the vision Hébert tried to promote throughout his career and in his teaching. We also will study his position with regard to the ethical and social roles of design. We will show that Hébert had an idealistic vision of design—influenced in part by the European modernists—and concentrated his efforts in promoting what we might call a humanistic design philosophy.

Whereas Canada still isn't recognized as a leader in the design field, this was even less the case in the 1940s and 50s when Hébert started his career. Nevertheless, Hébert wanted to change that situation. He was concerned that Canada's economy was based essentially on primary resources and was convinced that the country should concentrate on designing and producing its own products—more adapted to its environment and culture—and be less dependent on the importation of manufactured goods. All through his career, Hébert was dedicated to positioning Canada as a leader in design. He put a lot of effort into promoting the field to both the government and the general public. Indeed, he made many attempts to establish a structure on which to build stronger foundations for the field: he organized exhibitions, created design courses, and struggled to teach design in the early '50s in traditional fine arts institutions. He also traveled around Europe and the U.S., visiting different design centers and design schools with the objective of creating an important design institute in the city of Montreal. He played an active role as a designer for the Worlds Fair in Montreal in 1967 and at the ICSID conference also in Montreal that same year and won numerous design awards in Canada for the quality of his work. In the 1960s, as an instigator of modern design, Julien Hébert participated in what historians call Quebec's "quiet revolution."¹ It was a decade in which Canada's French-speaking province evolved from a conservative, traditional community into a modern society, initiating secular social structures (in health and education), as well

1 See previous article in *Design Issues* Cinzia Maurizia Giovine, "Jean-Marie Ga[ul]vreau: Art, Handicrafts, and National Culture in Quebec from the 1920s until the 1950s" *Design Issues* 10:3 (Autumn 1994): 22–31. And for more information on design in Canada, see Michael Large, "Communication Among All People Everywhere: Paul Arthur and the Maturing of Design" *Design Issues* 17:2 (Spring 2001): 81–90.

as new infrastructures in the areas of transportation (subway and highways), architecture, and urban planning. The Worlds Fair of 1967, where design was of great importance, is recognized as a major international event that played a key role in the evolution of Quebec society.

Julien Hébert's Career

Born in 1917, Hébert focused his studies on sculpture at the *École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal* (Montreal School of Fine Arts) from 1936 to 1941. This institution was strongly influenced by the French *Beaux-Arts* tradition, and its goal was to initiate students to classical painting, architecture, and sculpture in the Renaissance spirit. Though Hébert was quite talented, he found himself questioning the role of art in society, and decided he needed to deepen his thoughts with regard to this issue. Therefore, he pursued studies in philosophy at the University of Montreal, obtaining his degree in 1944. Hébert later would say:

I became a designer, probably because I studied both sculpture and philosophy. Sculpture is related to the form, the sensual, the touch. Philosophy is the mind, the reflection. Hence, moving to design was a logical step.²

This interesting and unusual education left a significant mark on his life since he always reflected deeply on his later activities and projects. This inclination towards reflection was expressed in his extensive writings. Hébert kept a personal diary for the major part of his professional career, from 1950 to 1980. In it he described his thoughts about philosophy, design, education, art, and architecture. In his writings, there is a certain influence from the French humanist neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), and also a strong advocacy of design's social role in society.

After his studies in philosophy, Hébert returned to sculpture—he didn't know anything about design at the time—and since he was interested in teaching, he found a position at his alma mater, the *École des Beaux-Arts* (Montreal School of Fine Arts). But in the late 40s, many students began to criticize the School because they considered its program outdated, cut off as it was from the modern art currents emerging in Europe. Moreover, many artists of that period felt that they didn't have much freedom to express themselves within the rigid and conservative religious society of Quebec, a province which was, at that time, dominated by the clergy and Catholic authority.³

Seeking a more stimulating environment, Hébert left Montreal for Paris, where he did a fifteen-month internship at the studio of the Russian sculptor Ossip Zadkine in 1947–1948. Hébert was greatly influenced by the post-war Paris because of his contacts with artists and intellectuals who had progressive ideas about art and society. He also was impressed by the cubist approach of Zadkine, and

2 Julien Hébert, from a radio interview, Radio-Canada, July 7, 1982.

3 In 1948, a group of artists (Borduas, Riopelle, Arbour, etc.) published a manifesto entitled *Le refus global—or Global Refusal*—denouncing the abuse of power by the clergy and expressing the need for more freedom of expression. This publication created quite an impact on Quebec society. It is considered to be one of the key events that led to the decline in the dominance of the clergy. These anticlerical ideas initiated drastic changes within political and economic spheres and led to many important reforms such as the secularization of education and health institutions in the 1960s.

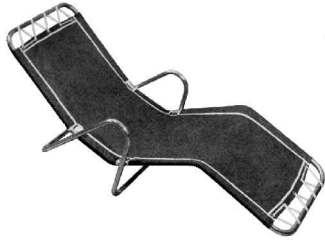


Figure 1 (above)

Julien Hébert, Contour Lounge Chair, 1953.

All images courtesy of Julein Hébert's estate archives, Musée du Québec, Québec City.

Fonds Julien-Hébert, Bibliothèque et Centre de documentation du Musée du Québec.



Figure 2 (right)

Advertisement for the Contour Lounge Chair, 1953.

became more familiar with the interrelation and interaction of art with architecture and design. Upon his return to Montreal, Hébert felt so enthusiastic about his discoveries in Europe that he decided to move things along in his own country.

He resumed his position at the Montreal School of Fine Arts, and shared his European experiences with his students. He continued to work as a sculptor, but only for site-specific projects since he wasn't interested in exhibiting his work in galleries or selling it to the rich bourgeois. For Hébert, who was striving for social engagement through art, this type of practice didn't make much sense.

In 1951, he entered in the first design competition in Canada. The competition was organized by the Federal Ministry of Trade and Commerce in order to promote the conversion of wartime industry into the manufacture of consumer goods. The idea of a design competition came from the head of the National Gallery in Ottawa, Donald Buchanan. He was inspired by the series of design exhibitions and contests organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which was eager to promote modern design in the United States.

As a winner of the competition, Hébert discovered his passion for design, a field by which he could better express his creativity while satisfying his social consciousness. Design appeared to him as a revelation, an answer to the existential questions he had in relation to the social meaning and dimension of art in society. He designed a chaise longue with an aluminum structure (figures 1 and 2). It consisted of two bent tubular forms resting on a triangular base that also functioned as an armrest. The chaise was stable in two positions: balanced on its base or lowered with its foot on the ground. Nylon or canvas covers were available in red, green, royal blue, and gold.

This project marked the start of Hébert's brilliant career. After seeing his aluminum chair in a newspaper article, Sigmund Werner, an Austrian manufacturer who had emigrated to Montreal to escape the Nazis, hired Hébert to design a line of aluminum and

steel furniture. Initially, Werner manufactured ski poles, but sales were slow due to several poor snow seasons. Therefore, he wished to diversify his production. Hébert collaborated with Werner to create a complete line of garden furniture. Hundreds of thousands of chairs were sold throughout the country in only a few months. In the meantime, Hébert's winning concept, the "Contour Chair," had been selected to represent Canada at the *Triennale di Milano* in 1954. It also appeared that same year in Milan's prestigious *Domus* magazine (November 1954) and London's *Decorative Arts Annual* (1954–55). It was one of the first Canadian products to receive international praise. The chair also was selected to be part of the New York Museum of Modern Art's design collection. The "Contour Chair" is the perfect synthesis of Hébert's design philosophy: inexpensive, practical, and well adapted to production and to the cultural context. It also has very pure structural lines, and is quite well proportioned.

From then on, Hébert put all of his energy into the design field, an area in which he thought art had genuine utility for society at large. Unlike the fine arts, reserved for the elite, Hébert considered design as a form of art for the masses. He emphasized "utilitarian forms," and wished that more artists would become interested in design to improve the aesthetics and functionality of everyday objects. Every aspect of design interested him: products, furniture, graphic, and interior design. He had a global vision of design, and didn't want any barriers between the different fields. For Hébert, all these forms of art were related to the same objectives: improving peoples' lives and environment; and allowing every class in society to have access to quality products which were both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

Parallel to his design practice, Hébert kept his position as a professor at the Montreal School of Fine Arts, then at the *École du meuble* (Furniture School). The *École du meuble* was headed by Jean-Marie Gauvreau,⁴ who had been trained in Paris at the *École Boulle* in the 1920s. Gauvreau's objective was to develop skilled craftsmen and cabinetmakers inspired by the French tradition. He wasn't sympathetic to design, a field he associated with the American invasion of cheap and tasteless industrial products covered with chrome. Hébert had to convince him that there was interest in the discipline in Quebec by providing examples from the Scandinavian model. Scandinavian design had successfully evolved from limited craft-based production towards the more important industrial production, while maintaining the tradition of man-made quality in objects and furniture. Indeed, Hébert always promoted the idea of linking design with the various crafts instead of creating a barrier between the two worlds. He was fascinated by the success of the Danish designers in the production of local goods:

4 Cinzia Maurizia Giovine takes a closer, if somewhat narrow look at Gauvreau's work, "Jean-Marie Ga[u]vreau: Art, Handicrafts, and National Culture in Quebec from the 1920s until the 1950s" *Design Issues* 10: 3 (Autumn 1994): 22–31.



Figure 3
Julien Hébert, on the left, receiving a design award from the National Industrial Design Council in 1957.

I am concerned to see that Denmark, with a population of only six million, has 2,000 members in its association of professional designers. In comparison, Canada has 200 designers for a population of 28 million. The Danish produce a great part of the designs they use, while in Canada, we import most of our manufactured goods.⁵

Hébert's major objectives therefore were to develop the design field in Canada and to invest his efforts into its promotion. In 1953, he was one of the founding members of the Canadian Association of Industrial Designers, and because of his leadership and professional reputation (he already had five or six patents for products he had developed), he was elected president in 1958. As a French Canadian, Hébert was definitely a pioneer since commerce and industry, in general, was neither valued nor greatly respected within the French-speaking community. The Catholic clergy was suspicious of Anglo-Protestant capitalism, and wanted francophones to concentrate on so-called "good" values such as those represented by agriculture, medicine, and the liberal professions. Moreover, Canada's economy was based essentially on primary resources, so far, the country had not developed the sector of transformation. To a certain degree, Hébert helped to change this situation through his involvement in the professional association and by playing a leading role as a designer.

The decade of the 1960s was very important in Hébert's career. He shared an office with a colleague who was an architect, while holding a teaching position at the newly founded *Institut des Arts Appliqués de Montréal* (Montreal Institute of Applied Arts). It was in that institution that he trained the first generation of designers. Ten years later, more than half the professional industrial designers of Quebec had been his students. Hébert was happy to see that the government and the public were beginning to recognize the value of design more and more. In those years, he worked on various projects, demonstrating the diversity of his practice. These included a mural in aluminum for a concert hall and the bus stop signs (figures 4 to 8) for the City of Montreal Transport Commission (Montreal was the first city in Canada to have surface route-maps for its bus transportation system). He also launched a collection of office furniture, and created symbols for different organizations.

The most important design event in Canada at that time was definitely the Worlds Fair, known as Expo '67. Hébert hired a few of his former students to work with him on designing exhibits for the Canadian and Quebec pavilions. The theme of Expo'67 was "Man and his World." In 1963, Hébert won the design competition for the official symbol of the event (figure 9). His design was composed of abstract figures displayed in a circular shape. The design can be interpreted in different ways: as a series of couples forming a circle on the planet, living in equality and harmony, their hands raised in

5 Newspaper article ("Journal La Presse"), Interview with J. Hébert, 1979.

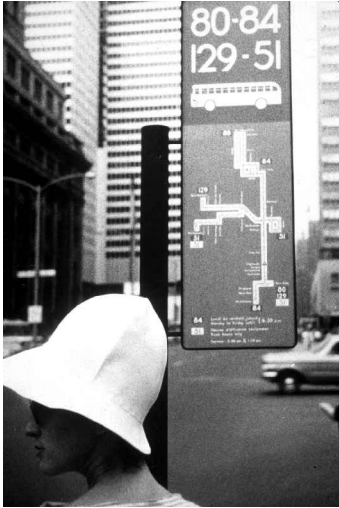


Figure 4 (above)
Bus stop sign for the City of Montreal
Transport Commission.



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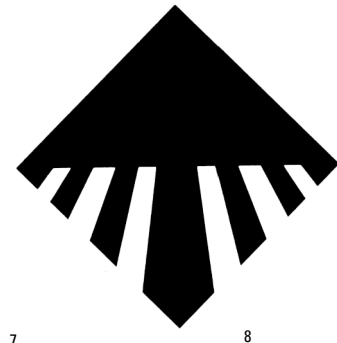
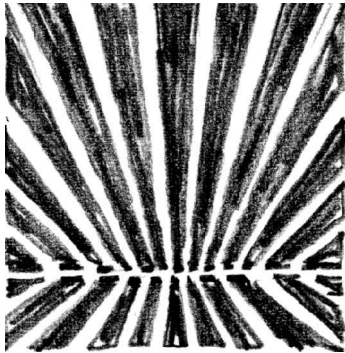
Figure 5
Bus stop shelter for the City of Montreal
Transport Commission.



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Figure 6
Office furniture.

Figure 7
Sketch for the trademark of the Airports
Association of Canada.

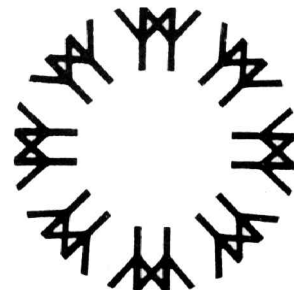


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Figure 8
Final version of the trademark.

Figure 9
Julien Hébert, Expo'67 Symbol,
"Man and His World", designed in 1963.



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the air as for a celebration. It also recalls the form of a large snowflake or a series of trees. This ambiguity suggests an interesting and ingenious relationship between nature and culture.

The public unveiling of Hébert's design for the symbol created quite an uproar in the media at the time. Instead of being saluted for its simplicity and aesthetic qualities, it created bitter debate when members of the Canadian Parliament found out Hébert's work had been selected to represent Canada. Many politicians thought the logo was a monstrosity, and wanted to replace it by something that would look like a more traditional representation of the country, such as the Canadian flag, the beaver, or some other variation of the maple leaf. Others were even more cynical, arguing that the logo looked like the drawing of a five-year-old.

The situation was quite shocking for Hébert, who realized that, although things were evolving, design was still not widely understood by everyone, not to mention the superficiality of certain politicians' points of view on art and design in general. On the other hand, in newspaper articles and editorials, the symbol was defended by art critics and designers. They argued that it was easily recognizable and simple to understand and remember, as well as very functional since it was convenient to enlarge or reproduce on different backgrounds. Hence, it had all the qualities of a good trademark design. Fortunately for Hébert, the controversy surrounding this symbol ceased as soon as it won a prestigious international design award in 1964 as top in its category at the 13th Annual Exhibition of Advertising, Editorial, and Television Art in New York. It also won the award for best trademark at the prestigious Top Symbols and Trademarks of the World competition in Switzerland. Therefore, in the light of this international acclaim, the critics had to recognize the credibility of its design, and the symbol was used for and identified with Expo '67 with great success. What marks this event even more is that the symbol still is widely used in Montreal to identify the Expo site and today, more than thirty-five years later, the population still recognizes the design as the symbol of Expo '67.

In 1970, Hébert designed the Canadian Pavilion for the Osaka Worlds Fair in Japan. He also worked on the interior design and created the furniture for the new international airport in Mirabel, close to Montreal. While carrying out these numerous projects, Hébert continued to teach at the *École de Design Industriel* (School of Industrial Design), which had opened in the mid-seventies and was attached to the University of Montreal. He won many design awards, but most important, in 1979, he received the Borduas Prize, Quebec's highest award in the field of visual arts, for the quality of his work and career as a designer. It was the first time this prize had been given to someone who wasn't primarily a painter or a sculptor. For Hébert, it was an indication that the design field finally was valued as highly as the fine arts, and this was one of his greatest rewards.

It should be noted that Hébert was not the only designer to help develop the field in Quebec at the beginning of the 1950s. Five or six other persons, who also had their own companies, were making their mark in the profession. Designers such as Jacques Guillon, Morley Smith, Douglas Ball, and Henry Finkel (who were trained as architects or had studied design abroad), also can be considered pioneers in Quebec. But Hébert's impact and influence was greater, mostly because he played an important role as a design educator and published many articles expressing his vision of design. Obviously, Hébert could have left his teaching duties and concentrated on his professional practice but, above all, he considered himself an educator.

Design and Ethics: Hébert's Idealist Vision

In order to understand Hébert's position more accurately, one can consider two different projects that he tried to initiate in the 1960s. In 1961, he prepared a proposal for a design institute in Montreal, in which he suggested to the Quebec Ministry of Trade and Commerce that a study be made of the possibility of opening a design center in which a university degree in industrial design would be offered at the Master's level. He also foresaw the establishment of an exhibition center, including an information and documentation room accessible to industrialists, designers, and the public at large. The government agreed to study the question and assigned Hébert the responsibility for preparing a report on the project. For this task, he visited different design institutes and schools in Europe and the U.S. The list of the people he consulted is impressive: Max Bill, the Swiss designer, architect, and artist who had graduated from the Bauhaus and who had been director of the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* in Ulm from 1951 to 1956; Charles-Édouard Geisenhof, professor of architecture in Zurich; Eric Herlow, from the *Kongelige Akademi* in Copenhagen; Mors Nilsson, Director of the Danish Design Center and Rudolf Harde, from a design school in Stockholm. He also met with Hans Gugelot and Bruce Archer in Ulm, and then went on to France to see Jean Poirier, from the *Formes utiles* association and also met with representatives of the French Ministry of National Education. He consulted professors at the Royal College of Art in London and the Chair of the British Design Council.

After his visit to Europe, Hébert was convinced of the necessity of grouping all the design fields within the same structure. He had seen a great deal of interesting design institutes, but felt the most successful ones were those organized in a centralized manner, avoiding administrative duplication. For the implementation of a design institute in Quebec, he suggested two major objectives: the training of qualified designers and the promotion of good design to industry and the general public. Hébert strongly recommended the creation of a specialized degree in design, since there was none at that time (he was basically the only professor of design in Quebec in the early 60s).

Figure 10 (right)
Maquette (view of the interior of the cafeteria
of the Canadian pavilion at Expo'67).

Figure 11 (below)
Picnic table designed for the Canadian
pavilion.



Therefore, he suggested that educators from abroad be hired in order to benefit from the teaching of experienced design professors.

Hébert promoted the idea of developing the design field in Quebec for a number of reasons. He insisted on the need to develop better products that would match the local cultural identity more specifically, and which would be better adapted to the specific environment and climate of this northern region.

We absolutely need a design institute in order to develop the field of design in Quebec. The quality of the products available to us is poor, they are copied on foreign models and do not reflect our culture or our specific tastes and needs. We have great natural resources but do not exploit our potential to design and produce manufactured goods better adapted to our specific cultural identity.⁶

He also promoted the development of the design profession and industry for the economic benefit of the province. Hébert believed that design could revive the lost tradition of excellence related to the arts and crafts of Quebec. He always felt that industrial design was the logical evolution of traditional crafts, and that good craftsmen should orient their art towards industrial production.

Although he fought for the establishment of a design institute, his project was not approved. In 1961, design was still not a priority of the provincial government. Hébert felt quite bitter because he really thought the province was missing a great opportunity to develop an important cultural and economic pole. He was convinced that Quebec had the potential to be a leader in design, and eventually could export quality products to other countries. He had studied the situation all over the world and was envious of the importance the Scandinavians, Italians, and Germans were giving to design. In his report, he also wrote about the situation in Japan:

Japan, known for producing cheap products and copying foreign models at a poor quality, is now putting tremen-

6 Julien Hébert, *Rapport pour un Institut de design à Montréal* (Not published, 1961), 4.

dous efforts into developing the design field and raising the quality of its production. In 1960, the Japanese government distributed grants to more than sixty students to give them the possibility of studying design in Europe and America.⁷

Years later, seeing how Japan had gained one of the strongest reputations in industrial design, he was frustrated to note that the field could have been developed with a lot more energy in Quebec and Canada instead of remaining stagnant. Eventually Hébert's ideas were adopted, although many years later. A promotion center named "Design Canada" was active in the 70s and early 80s, and a design institute⁸ finally was opened in Montreal in 1992!

There is yet another project that can help us understand Hébert's vision of design. In 1971, he tried once again to convince the government to implement a project related to the problem of unemployment. He submitted a report in which he described how design could help reintegrate inactive people into the workplace. Hébert suggested putting what he called "mini-industries" in regions where unemployment was high. In these reduced-scale enterprises, people would be trained to produce useful objects using local materials. After a certain time, these same people would be encouraged to create and develop new models with the help of experienced designers. Eventually, this structure would grow into a small-to medium-sized industry, which would distribute its production on a larger scale. Hébert had in mind the example of the company Bombardier,⁹ which had started as a small enterprise producing snowmobiles, a transportation technology perfectly adapted to the specific needs of northern communities.

For Julien Hébert, this initiative was meant to give unemployed people access to new technologies, develop their skills, and be stimulated by doing something useful for society. Even though he was critical of large industries in which people did repetitive and tedious tasks, he considered small industry to be a stimulating place where creativity and innovation were of great importance. Hébert was convinced that design was at the root of every industry, which is why he believed designers had an important role to play in order to develop employment in the country. Moreover, he strongly believed that producing quality objects would be a source of pride for workers.

This project was turned down once again by the government, probably because it sounded a little too utopian to the pragmatic politicians. Nevertheless, with his students and in his articles, Hébert continued to promote the idea of the importance of social implication for designers.

7 Ibid., 8.

8 In 1991, a government study (*Picard Report*) has identified the design field as an important economic pole for the development of Montreal, this report led to the foundation of the "Institut de Design Montreal." Its role is to do the promotion of the different design disciplines: graphic, web, interior and product design.

9 Joseph-Armand Bombardier (1908–1964) was an inventor and designer, who founded his company in 1942 to manufacture tracked vehicles for transportation on snow-covered terrain. The company's name at that time was L'Auto-Neige Bombardier Limitée. It is now one of the largest company in the world producing a wide variety of transportation vehicles, such as, boats, trains and aircrafts.

Conclusion: Hébert's Vision and Influence

Hébert was convinced that Canada had the potential to develop the profession and become a leader in design, inspired by the Scandinavian model. But for Hébert, design was more than just a tool to develop the economy: it was a creative activity and a culturally meaningful form of art which led to the production of products that improved people's quality of life and enhanced the cultural environment as a whole.

Moreover, Hébert had immense respect for the crafts and wished that design would inherit the richness and quality of their work ethic developed over the ages. Since he had social concerns, he was against all forms of art reserved for the elite, and he hoped that craftspeople and artists would orient their skills toward the creation of aesthetic and functional objects accessible to everyone, thanks to the reduction in costs brought about by industrial production. In many ways, he shared the ideas of Walter Gropius and other pioneers of modern design. That is why, at the end of his career in the 1980s, Hébert felt very troubled by the postmodern movement and the evolution of design on the international scene. Above all, he was angry to see that design was becoming more and more associated with expensive, high-end products. He thought that designers signing their creations like artists signing their works created a "star-system" and elitist attitudes.

What could we conclude about his influence? Hébert's career and the discourse he adopted served as an example to Quebec's and Canada's design community. Some of the major issues he brought to light were: the importance of social design; the role of design in the public sphere; and the possible link between modern design and the traditional crafts.

The Importance of Social Design

Through the social projects he tried to initiate and the various assignments he gave to his students, Hébert promoted the idea that designers are not just creators of aesthetic objects meant for industrial production. He thought that designers could play an active role and contribute directly to the positive evolution of society and culture. They could be proactive by initiating social projects designed to improve the lives of the poor, the handicapped, the sick, the elderly, and so on. It was obvious to Hébert that designers should not work solely for the benefit of private companies, but should participate actively within nonprofit organizations and community groups in order to make their expertise available as part of the social economy. In this sense, he was close to the current represented by such important figures as Buckminster Fuller and Victor Papanek.

The Role of Design in the Public Sphere

Although Hébert was active in the creation of furniture and products oriented towards private and domestic use, he also was very concerned about the importance of design quality in the public environment. This issue is somewhat closer to urban architecture, because it has a direct impact on the city landscape. Yet for Hébert, the field of urban design was just as important as any other. Indeed, as a designer and even as a sculptor, he undertook many projects in that area, such as the interior and exhibition design for a number of major trade fairs, the furniture design for the Montreal airport, and many elements related to public transport. Therefore, he insisted that street signs and urban furniture such as bus stops, park benches, and even picnic tables should be very well designed since they represent part of our material culture. Hébert felt that the public ought to be aware of the importance of the public environment, and he promoted the idea that designers and architects should become more conscious of the importance of their cultural role as modelers of the urban landscape.

The Link Between Modern Design and the Traditional Crafts

Modern architecture and design often have been accused of turning their backs on traditional usage. International architecture is considered as the epitome of this attitude. Indeed, it has generated impersonal buildings in many cities in the world, designed with very little concern for their integration into the urban landscape and its specific social and cultural context. Naturally, Hébert was not in favor of this radical aspect of modernism; he was always an advocate of the long tradition of excellence espoused by the various crafts. However, he was concerned about traditional crafts declining in Quebec and failing to meet the challenge of industrial production. At the same time, he could see that industrial processes were not getting the benefit of the craftspeople's knowledge, since links were not being established between the two sectors. On the other hand, Gauvreau's approach at the *École du meuble* was to keep traditional crafts alive by completely ignoring the evolution of technology and the concept of modern design.

As a result of such attitudes, the crafts and industrial sectors have not moved forward together harmoniously in Quebec, as they have in Italy, Germany, and Scandinavia, where modern design has long been considered to be outstanding. Hébert fought hard to fill the gap by promoting modern design as an extension of the crafts, and trying to avoid a rupture with them. Obviously, the conflict between the arts and the crafts has its roots in the history of design, from Muthesius to van de Velde, and from Morris to Gropius. Between the tides of Gauvreau's conservative advocacy of traditional crafts and the massive invasion of imported manufactured goods (mostly American), Hébert promoted the idea of distinct, original Quebec design, in continuity with the craft tradition.



Figure 12
Stamp representing Industrial Design in
Canada; Julien Hébert's design is at bottom
right.

Hébert the Humanist: A Man Ahead of His Time

When we look at Hébert's career, it seems clear that his ideas were well ahead of their time in both Quebec and Canada. Many of his initiatives and projects, such as the foundation of a design institute as early as 1961, were not realized until very recently. Design still is a field that needs to be developed in Canada, but it seems nowadays that the political and economic spheres are much more aware of the situation and have a better understanding of the importance of the field. There is no doubt that, through the quality of his work and his many efforts to promote design as a global activity touching the whole community, Hébert remains as one of the major figures to have contributed to this evolving scene. The province of Quebec acknowledged Hébert's outstanding contribution by awarding him the Borduas prize in 1979. In addition, a series of postage stamps (figure 12) was created recently to pay tribute to the pioneers of industrial design in Canada, on which one of Hébert's best known designs.

If he had a more direct influence in any one area, it was definitely on his students, who have great respect for his ideas. Many practicing professionals herald his influence, such as the well-known Quebec designer Michel Dallaire, who has commented: "He made us understand what design was all about."¹⁰ For his students, he was more than a professor; he was a mentor. Making art accessible to all was his vision of design.

¹⁰ Quoted in a newspaper article, *Le Devoir*,
Montreal, July 23, 1994.

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