CAROLINE ANDRIEUX
and the making of an art scene

BY **BRYNE McLAUGHLIN**

Caroline Andrieux has a knack for being in the right place at the right time. It's a remarkable skill—Andrieux calls it "magic"—that the French-born curator and founder and artistic director of Montreal's Darling Foundry has turned to her advantage time and again over the past three decades. From the outskirts of Paris to the industrial ruins of Montreal, Andrieux always finds a way to make big things happen, not only in producing exhibitions that connect artists and audiences from across the cultural spectrum, but also in conjuring a succession of groundbreaking institutions that bind those communities together.

In person, Andrieux seems much younger than her 52 years. She exudes a modest dynamism and open-minded directness that, even though she is midway through a PhD on radical art practices, suggests little room for art-world pretense. Whether taking tea in an artist's studio at the Darling Foundry or chatting with calèche drivers outside of one of the city's last independent horse stables, she is down-to-earth and engaged. With Andrieux, what you see is what you get.

When it comes to a deeper discussion of Andrieux's work as a curator and institution builder, however, a wired intensity takes hold. She is determinedly anti-authoritarian and her voice carries the seasoned enthusiasm of an "intellectual entrepreneur," as she puts it, who has long swum against the conventional tide of exhibition making and institutional thinking. If her intonation is slightly more wary than weary, it is because the insights gained from years of developing programming, shepherding artists, negotiating terms with landlords and government officials and rallying audiences—not to mention finding the resources to bring everything together—

Aude Moreau *Tapis de sucre 3* 2008 Sugar and pigment 8 x 19 m COURTESY GALERIE ANTOINE ERTASKIRAN PHOTO GUY L'HEUREUX

Build and They Will Come

Caroline Andrieux at the Darling Foundry, December 2014
PHOTO ALEX MEYBOOM

OPPOSITE: **Alexandre David** *Plate-forme* 2011 Plywood and wood 1.1 x 12.2 x 9.2 m
COURTESY PARISIAN LAUNDRY
PHOTO GUY L'HEUREUX

have made the spontaneous drive of her projects all the more worthwhile.

In talking with Andrieux, you quickly understand that her practice is intrinsically personal. She speaks passionately about her commitment to art as "something for the people in the streets." She feels a sense of individual responsibility for the legacies of the formerly disused or abandoned sites where she works. There's an almost maternal fondness to the way she describes her relationships with artists and colleagues that comes in part, one suspects, from being the mother of two adult children, but also because Andrieux has frequently struggled alongside artists in the near-squatting conditions of the buildings she's co-opted. She's lived without hot water for months at a time, and worked without heat in the dead of winter. More than once, her office has been her bedroom, and vice versa.

The way Andrieux has pulled projects and institutions together has less to do with magic than with sheer determination and a keen eye for opportunity. For Andrieux, it's not so much about being in the right place at the right time; it's about being in the right place all the time. Her destined sense of what the art world can and should be ranges back to mid-1980s New York, where she had gone from Paris as a student to immerse herself in the city's graffiti scene. The experience stuck. "When I came back to Paris, I was doing exhibitions in very awkward spaces, like a railroad station, or in friends' studios, or in my mother's antique shop," Andrieux remembers. "Then a friend said, my father just bought a factory that's going to be demolished soon, but maybe he can lend it to us to make a show before he destroys it." It was one of those magic moments.

From the initial, one-month exhibition in Paris in May 1987, Usine Éphémère—as Andrieux and her friend, musician Christophe Pasquet, came to call the abandoned chemicals factory—was explosively popular. Their ad hoc lease stretched to six months, then three years. The pair organized monthly exhibitions of emerging artists and held concerts to raise funds ("We made really, really important parties there," she notes). And, crucial to Andrieux's growing sense of organizational potential, they made cheap space available for artists. "Studios were there from the start," she says, "the idea of creation, production and dissemination in the same space. For me, this hasn't changed."

It wasn't just the ideal of creating a vibrant hub for artists at Usine Éphémère that appealed to Andrieux; it was also the dynamics of the site itself. "I'm very sensitive to buildings," she explains. "When I'm in a building that inspires me to do installations or work, I feel that potential for layers of meaning and use."

As their lease came to an end in 1990, Andrieux and Pasquet began to search for something new. Again, the magic happened. "We were going all around Paris, at night, saying, where are we going to go?" she recalls. "Then we suddenly found this abandoned hospital, which became Hôpital Éphémère." It took the pair a year to convince the owner of the former Hôpital Bretonneau to hand over the keys to the 20,000-square-metre block of buildings. For Andrieux, who was 26 at the time, it was a huge find and a huge responsibility: "We started to have big funds from the government and committees to choose the artists. When we were going to the minister of culture saying, we have a big hospital, we need money, he was saying, show me the lease, I don't believe you."

In spite of this disbelief, momentum behind Hôpital Éphémère kept building. Curators like Nicolas Bourriaud became regular visitors. High-profile artists, including Gary Hill, Daniel Spoerri and Ilya Kabakov, took up residence in the complex's 60 low-rent studios. Then-emerging artists like Thomas Hirschhorn had their first solo shows there. "He put all of his work on the floor," Andrieux recounts. "I left for the weekend and when I returned I said, okay, when are you going to hang the work? He said: I'm not. Things like that were very constructive for me. They taught me."

But that wasn't all Andrieux was learning. By the time of Hôpital Éphémère's sixth anniversary in 1996, juggling the needs of big exhibitions, personalities and costs had taken their toll. "Everything was more tight, more difficult," she says, looking back. "In terms of artistic vision, I was still very free. But dealing with the day-to-day complaints from neighbours and artists, that became heavy." She started looking for a way out.

"I didn't know Montreal," Andrieux readily admits, but what she discovered when she first visited in 1992 on an invitation from Quebec's ministry of culture suited her just fine. She remembers touring Montreal's Griffintown. "We saw that every building was abandoned," she says. "It was amazing. I was interested in this kind of building and they showed me a whole neighbourhood filled with them! I was so impressed."

Andrieux leapt to work. On returning to Paris, she secured a French government grant to set up Quartier Éphémère, a satellite space for Hôpital Éphémère in Montreal. Back in Montreal in 1994, she negotiated with the city for a five-year rent-free lease at 16 Prince Street in Griffintown, where a skeleton staff managed an exhibition space and six artist studios. On visits back and forth between France and Quebec over the next two years, she started to make connections with local artists, including

Mathieu Beauséjour, Michael Robinson and Alain Paiement, and to program exhibitions and exchanges.

By 1996, a major project was underway. Fixed on that first impression of Griffintown's post-industrial wasteland, Andrieux—now relocated to Montreal—had deftly negotiated with local owners and politicians (already in the process of rebranding the area as a gentrified zone called Cité du Multimédia) for a series of in situ installations in and around the neighbourhood's ramshackle buildings. "Panique au Faubourg" ran throughout June 1997 and featured major site-responsive works by French artists like Claude Lévêque and Pierre Huyghe alongside installations by Paiement and Vancouver's Roy Arden, among others.

It was a watershed moment for Andrieux and for the city's larger cultural fabric. "'Panique au Faubourg' was another miracle in my life," Andrieux says. "It was very popular. I remember even policemen coming to see this show in abandoned buildings. Also, this was the English industrial part of the city that had been largely abandoned for 20 years. So it was a bit of a mystery for Montrealers to come back to."

For many, one of the most memorable works was Lévêque's giant disco-ball installation in a derelict metalworks at the corner of Prince and Ottawa Streets. Dating from the 1880s to the early 1900s, the buildings that make up what had been the Darling Brothers Foundry had sat vacant since 1991, and were scheduled for demolition. "Panique au Faubourg" gave the site a new life and Quartier Éphémère a new future. "After we organized 'Panique,' we realized the potential of this building," says Andrieux. "So we installed a trailer inside the big space and that was our office for two years." "It was snowing in the space," she continues, "and it was a palace of pigeons, but my mind was firmly set on saving the building."

Andrieux's timing was impeccable. Planning for the Cité du Multimédia redevelopment was moving into high gear, and they needed a cultural flagship. Provincial and federal coffers were brimming with capital funds for millennial projects. The success of "Panique au Faubourg" had given the slightly dishevelled Quartier Éphémère a newfound cachet among local artists, critics, curators and, most importantly, art patrons and publics.

"This building brings so many new possibilities in terms of occupying the space," Andrieux says of the Darling Foundry's 500-square-metre exhibition hall. "It's a space that's living, and that's very interesting for curating." And curate she has. Since 2002, Andrieux has presented solo projects by an A-list of established and emerging artists, many at times when they were on the cusp of bigger national and international careers: Brian Jungen, Alexandre David, Stan Douglas, Jana Sterbak, Luis Jacob, Kristina Lee Podesva, Charles Stankievech, Abbas Akhavan, BGL, Olivia Boudreau, Karen Kraven. The list continues.

Installation view of **Abbas Akhavan**'s "Beacon" 2012 Polyurethane foam, mortar, oil, honey, stacked sandbags, envelope of hot-air balloon, fan, digital timer and bird songs Dimensions variable
PHOTO JOSÉE PEDNEAULT

In 2006, an adjacent studio building opened, with eight low-rent spaces available to local artists for three-year-lease stints and four live-and-work residencies that have drawn artists from France, Switzerland, Latin America, Australia and India. There is a constant flow of traffic, brought by public studio tours that Andrieux regularly arranges and spontaneous visits from curators and dealers from both home and abroad. Anthony Burnham, Valérie Blass, Jessica Eaton, Julie Favreau and Nicolas Lachance are just a few of the young Montreal artists who have seen their careers take off in tandem with Darling Foundry studio placements. While on residency this past spring, British artist Tris Vonna-Michell produced one of two new film works highlighted in the 2014 Turner Prize exhibition.

Yet it is not as if there haven't been struggles. As Andrieux recounts ruefully, Quartier Éphémère has yet to receive a regular operating grant from the Canada Council—she's been told that the organization is too "mystic." The indeterminate, and at times chaotic, institutional structure might be seen by some as a weakness, but it is also the Darling Foundry's greatest strength. As a dynamic hybrid between artist-run *kunsthalle* and independent studio complex, it stands alone among Canadian art institutions. Andrieux's spontaneous-by-necessity curating allows her to be nimble with her ideas and always on the lookout for partnerships that respond quickly to the ebb and flow of global contemporary artmaking. Importantly, the Darling Foundry has anchored a cultural renaissance that has seen high-profile venues like DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art, Arsenal and Galerie René Blouin put down roots in the area. The once-desolate factory neighbourhood is now ground zero for contemporary art in the city.

As for the future: a new residency in conjunction with the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul, Korea, has been confirmed for this year. Andrieux is also in talks with Bourriaud about a partnership with the École nationale supérior des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he is now director. Incoming residents from Spain, El Salvador, Scotland and France will join solo exhibitions in 2015 by artists from Luxembourg, Belgium and Montreal. Andrieux is also working on turning the street in front of the gallery into a permanent public space for art. Whatever else is in store for Andrieux and the Darling Foundry is, by the very nature of the organization, anyone's guess. But one thing is for sure—it's bound to have more of the same magic. ■