

Mural honouring Mordecai Richler inaugurated



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A mural of Mordecai Richler on Laurier Ave. W. in Montreal Monday, September 12, 2016. *JOHN KENNEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

A mural commemorating Mordecai Richler was inaugurated Monday in the Plateau-Mont-Royal

neighbourhood in which he grew up and that he immortalized.

It took two local artists 20 days to create the work rendered on the side of a three-storey building on Laurier Ave. just west of St-Laurent Blvd., complete with Richler's likeness, characters from his novels and a stylized streetscape, at a cost of \$50,000. Ten per cent of that amount will go toward maintaining the artwork in the future.

Meanwhile, the gazebo on the eastern flank of Mount Royal rebuilt in Richler's honour was open to the public Monday, five years after it was first promised by the city, but without an official inauguration thus far.

The last estimate for its cost was \$724,000, more than double the initial estimate of \$299,000. Requests for interviews regarding the gazebo's official status or price tag were not returned by the city.



A view of the Mordecai Richler gazebo on Mount Royal in Montreal, Sept. 12, 2016. The much delayed, expensive gazebo appears to be finished, but no announcement from the city has been made. *JOHN KENNEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

At Monday's inauguration, Richler's widow said she was delighted with how the mural "exudes the spirit of Mordecai. The gravity of his nature. ... He was quite an extraordinary man — he was no ordinary person, and I don't say that

because I'm partisan," Florence Richler said. "He really was very complex, but also very compassionate. And he was a very serious Quebecer and, one forgets, he was a satirist. And satirists can be very cruel, ostensibly. But they can make us wiser if we read them properly."

The mural coincides with the 15th anniversary of Richler's death. It is part of the Montreal's Great Artists series of works

(<http://www.mumtl.org/en/projects/hommage-a-mordecai-richler-2016-2/>)

commissioned by the non-profit group MU that promotes murals rooted in local communities with funding from Montreal and Quebec's Culture Department. Other artists honoured include pianists Oscar Peterson and Oliver Jones, author Dany Laferrière and playwright Michel Tremblay.

"Artists chosen are those who were born or lived in Montreal, who created work that made Montreal resonate both at home and internationally, and who used Montreal as their muse," MU artistic director Elizabeth-Ann Doyle said. "I would say Mordecai Richler fits all of those."

Artists Dominique Desbiens and Bruno Rouyère drew a likeness of Richler, as well as characters representing those in many of his books, including the young outsider Richler often portrayed in his works. Within the image is transcribed a portion of a review of Richler's book of short stories *The Street*, written by Naïm Kattan in 1968. The snippet is reproduced in its original French to expose Richler's works to a younger generation of francophones and bring together the solitudes he often wrote about, Desbiens and Rouyère said.

"Mordecai Richler never forgot the street where he was born and where he grew up: St-Urbain," reads the review. "In several of his novels, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *Son of a Smaller Hero*, he describes this street. His main character, however, reacts against his neighbourhood, against his family and wants to leave to discover the big city before going off to conquer the world."

Much like Richler. But even though he could have lived anywhere in his later years, he had to return to Quebec and Montreal, Florence Richler said.

"He just loved it here. He knew it intimately," she said. "And he was one of the few who didn't wear blinkers. Satirists don't wear blinkers. They see everything. And their interpretation is often controversial, but if you're a wise

man and a satirist you can convey something which can be illuminating — particularly, I think, to young people who are much more open.”

As to the gazebo, she said with a laugh that she had already offered to pay for the paint, if it would help.

“I always hoped it would be finished one day,” she said. “I have great faith in our mayor.”

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