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**Olindo Gratton (1855-1941) – Religion et sculpture**  
**[Exerpt: English summary]**

Bernard Mulaire, Montréal, Éditions Fides, 1989, 191 pages.

*Translated from French by Donald Goodes and Kevin Cook.*

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**Foreword**

For over sixty years, Joseph-Olindo Gratton (1855-1941) made his career in the Montreal area, first as an ornamental sculptor and wood-worker, then as a statuary. He saw himself as an artist-sculptor. His works were executed in clay, plaster, cement, wood (sometimes covered in metal). He also conceived works in stone and bronze. In total, over three-hundred works, produced between 1877 and 1939, are attributed to him.

Olindo Gratton was one of the first French-Canadian sculptors who attempted to establish a clientele for secular commemorative pieces, however, circumstances were such that his talents were best used in the service of religion. For the most part, his works decorated places of worship. His most notable works are the imposing statues that decorate the facade of the Marie-Reine-du-Monde et Saint-Jacques-le-Majeur Cathedral-Basilica in Montreal. From this grouping, produced between 1892 and 1900, Gratton attained a kind of status as unofficial diocesan sculptor.

Gratton's reputation brought him important commissions until the end of the 1920's. As a result, he was able to be as prolific in his later years as he had been earlier in his career. During this period of his life, he produced two life-size oak *Christ en croix* pieces for Sainte-Catherine-d'Alexandrie Church in Montreal (1929) and Sainte-Madeleine Church in Outremont (1930) -- these are among his most accomplished works.

In the 1930's, Olindo Gratton was already losing prominence on the artistic scene, and after his death he was quickly forgotten. Quebec was discovering abstract art at this time -- consequently Gratton's statuary preoccupations were seen as stemming from a distant past.

Art historian Gérard Morisset's evaluation of Gratton in *Coup d'œil sur les arts en Nouvelle-France* (1941) plunged him even further into obscurity. For reasons which will be discussed later, Morisset divided Quebec sculpture into two categories: "decorative," which was connected to the atelier apprenticeship system; and "academic," which was learned in a school. The historian placed Gratton in the older "decorative" category, classing him among the "ornemanistes de la vieille école, consciencieux, amoureux de leur métier, vrais héritiers

des sculpteurs-paysans de l'âge héroïque." This judgement (which will be later questioned) was nuanced when Morisset affirmed "Mais le métier n'est plus ce qu'il était jadis," and at least took into account Gratton's role in the history of Quebec sculpture. However, with Modernity asserting its presence, this did little to keep the sculptor from being relegated to a by-gone age.

Forty years later, Professor Robert Derome was to refer to the sculptor as the "fantôme énigmatique des oubliettes de l'histoire de la sculpture québécoise." Gratton's downfall was especially surprising given that, during his very long career, he succeeded not only in gaining the support of religious authorities, but in holding a real position in Montreal's art scene. Recent studies have examined the role of Montreal institutions in the areas of teaching and exhibiting art. These include the Council of Arts and Manufactures' school, the Institut National (commonly known as the Institution Nationale) des Beaux-Arts (founded by *Abbé* Joseph Chabert), and the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice. Gratton frequented these institutions as a student and/or professor and as an exhibiting artist.

In addition, new research has familiarized us with the work of several of the principal Montreal artists of the period, most notably: painter, sculptor, architect and art critic Napoléon Bourassa (1827-1916); sculptor Louis-Philippe Hébert (1850-1917); painter Maurice Cullen (1866-1934); and sculptor Alfred Laliberté (1878-1953). Gratton had close contact with these artists, having been the disciple of the first, the student and employee of the second, and the teacher of the remaining two. Even the Carli and Petruccis, sculptors who worked in plaster, have been studied -- Gratton ceded his teaching position at the Council of Arts and Manufactures to Alexandre Carli (1861-1937). Furthermore, it seems he provided prototypes for statues for the T. Carli atelier, directed by Alexandre Carli at the time. Research on these institutions and artists has thus paved the way for a new appreciation of Olindo Gratton.

Early Quebec sculpture has long been recognized as a major art form, as distinctive as any other practice in Quebec, be it architecture, painting or the goldsmith trade. In 1920, the first monograph on sculpture was published, which was Émile Vaillancourt's study on the atelier of Louis Quévillon (1749-1823). This work constitutes the first study on Quebec art based on primary material. Quévillon, a native of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, was an important figure in the evolution of sculpture in Quebec.

Quebec sculpture has since continued to attract the attention of researchers. Historians Marius Barbeau and E.R. Adair were among the pioneers in this field, the latter having even corrected the writings of ground-breaker Gérard Morisset. The 1946 exhibition *The Arts of French Canada 1613-1870*, presented by R.H. Hubbard and Marius Barbeau at the Detroit Institute of Arts, introduced both foreign and Canadian audiences to the richness of Quebec's artistic heritage, especially with regards to its sculpture.

Subsequently, other art historians have increased our awareness of the medium. Gérard Lavallée, at the Musée d'art de Saint-Laurent, created a privileged place for the appreciation of early Quebec art, while Jean Trudel featured Quebec sculpture in major exhibitions at the Musée du Québec. In 1984, Trudel headed a group which produced *Le Grand Héritage : L'Église catholique et les arts au Québec*, an exhibition accompanied by a superb catalogue. This show underlined the undeniable contribution that Quebec sculptors have made to the artistic heritage of the province.

In 1986, two events revived the interest of early Quebec sculpture devotees. First there was the Musée du Québec's exhibition on sculptor Louis Jobin (1845-1928), organized by Mario Béland. Never before had an exhibition of such scope focused on a Québécois sculptor of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. An important catalogue accompanied the show. This was followed by the publication of John R. Porter and Jean Bélisle's, *La sculpture ancienne au Québec, Trois siècles d'art religieux et profane*. This book was the first exhaustive overview of the subject and was intended as response to, in the authors' own words: "un engouement généralisé pour les témoins matériels de notre passé" (p. 13). Olindo Gratton was among the artists singled out, about whom Porter rightly indicated the lack of information (p. 392):

S'il est révélateur à plus d'un point de vue, le bref aperçu que nous venons de donner de la production religieuse d'Olindo Gratton n'en demeure pas moins nettement insuffisant. En effet, à défaut d'une bonne monographie, nous devons aujourd'hui nous résigner à une connaissance superficielle de la carrière et de l'œuvre de ce statuaire sur bois et modelleur naguère célèbre.

Our study sets out to correct this deficiency.

Finally, when considering the state of research on early Quebec sculpture we cannot ignore the retrospectives presently being organized by Montreal Museum of Fine Art curators Nicole Cloutier and Yves Lacasse on Alfred Laliberté and Louis-Philippe Hébert.

The present exhibition, *Olindo Gratton (1855-1941): Religion et sculpture*, and its catalogue, take their place alongside these efforts to increase awareness about Quebec sculpture from the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. The intent here is to foster a greater understanding of the context in which art was being produced at the time, not only in the hope of establishing the importance that religious subject matter held, but also to determine the specific role played by Gratton.

To give coherence to the exhibition, only examples of Gratton's work inspired by religion, that is, his principal œuvre, have been selected. Despite the limitations imposed in borrowing objects of this genre, the thirty-five works assembled can be considered representative of almost the entirety of the sculptor's active period. They illustrate the different types of sculptural practice (low relief, high relief, free-standing) and almost all the various media the artist employed.

The *Introductory Notes* to this catalogue give a general overview of religious statuary in Quebec and Europe, providing the context for our study of Olindo Gratton's career. Personalities with whom the sculptor had frequent contact are then presented within the framework of the important cultural and religious institutions of the time. The chronology of events and the evolution of ideas remain a constant preoccupation throughout.

We should also mention that each work in the exhibition is reproduced and that detailed technical information is provided. As well, the reader will find appended individual bibliographies for each of these works, with coded entries that refer to a general bibliography which is reserved exclusively for the works exhibited.

## **Introductory Notes**

Our study of Gratton's career shall examine the various factors which influenced the production of religious sculpture in Quebec. However, it is important to first sketch out certain particularities of religious statuary practice in Europe and Quebec, and to clarify, in this context, the role played by the sponsor and the parameters defined for artistic originality.

It should be remembered that the objective of religious statuary, like that of all religious art, was (and still is) strictly to fulfill the requirements of worship and all other matters relating to the Church's pastoral responsibilities. The visual language employed has always been highly codified. Consequently, it is difficult to judge art which has been put in the service of Christian iconography according to Modern criteria for innovation and originality.

Certainly, the best artists have always been able to work within these restrictions, while still individuating their production through a unique treatment or arrangement of the prescribed components. An artist's ability to do this was strongly dependent on the degree of training that he/she received and on his/her proximity to influential scholarly art centres. In provincial and colonial areas such as Nouvelle-France and the province of Quebec, precarious social conditions (isolation, poverty, limited apprenticeship), perpetuated a loyalty to old world

models until the onset of the 20th century. Esteemed iconographic prototypes came to artists in the form of imported engravings and sculptures, which were widely distributed in the colony at that time.

The history of early religious sculpture in Quebec is characterized by *mimétisme*, deliberately undertaken in culturally sophisticated circles, and made available for the utmost enjoyment and benefit of all. Many priests and parishioners would commission replicas of works seen in neighbouring parishes, but, in the spirit of rivalry, would want theirs to be richer and more beautiful.

The Montreal area witnessed many examples of sculptural imitation. One of the most famous cases is that of the *Vierge*, which was wrought in silver in Paris, circa 1712-17, and was given to the Sulpicians of Notre-Dame, possibly by Louis XIV. The statuette was the work of a talented silversmith. Several copies were made of it -- the first may have been the large wood statue that ornamented the pediment of the old Notre-Dame Church in Montreal. Subsequent copies include: a large wood statue, now in the care of the Musée d'art de Saint-Laurent, but originally from Varennes' third church (1779-1883); a small silver statuette by Salomon Marion (1782-1830) which belonged to the church in Verchères (National Gallery of Canada); and two wood statues that are attributed to René Saint-James (1785-1837), one having once belonged to the church in Chambly, the other to the church in Saint-Paul de Joliette (Musée du Québec).

Montreal sculptor Charles Dauphin (1807-74) (with whom Olindo Gratton apprenticed) modelled numerous works after academic pieces. A good example is the *Vierge des navigateurs*, which is believed to be carved by him. This wood statue, which once dominated the apse of Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours Chapel in Montreal (from 1848 to 1892), now stands inside the edifice. It was patterned after the *Vierge dorée*, a bronze statuette cast in Paris and donated to the Chapel a few months earlier by Montreal bishop Ignace Bourget. Both of these works are based on the iconographic model "Vierge du Sourire," which is a variation on the Immaculate Conception, such as it was popularized after 1830 by the "Miraculous Medal" (a devotional medal struck with the effigy of the Virgin Mary as she appeared to Catherine Labouré) and a print which was based on it.

Louis-Philippe Hébert, who Olindo Gratton assisted from 1881 to 1888, was also known to draw on famous examples of Christian art. For example, his statues of Saint Michael (1879-87), at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Ottawa and at Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Chapel in Montreal, both borrow from Raphael; he owes his *Saint André* (Notre-Dame Cathedral, Ottawa) to Peter Vischer. Also attributed to Hébert is the stunning *Christ en croix* (1907) at the Marie-Reine-du-Monde Cathedral in Montreal, which evokes Bonnat's painting of Christ.

Like the above-mentioned works, Gratton's mimetic and academic sculpture can be seen as late expressions of this willingness to borrow from the European tradition.

It is important to point out that, in 19th century Europe, the practice of copying was considered a legitimate genre. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a painter like Antoine-Sébastien Falardeau, a native of Quebec, had an outstanding career as a copyist in Italy. The recognition overseas of copying as an artistic genre both guaranteed its acceptance and contributed to the preference for scholarly (academic) European art here in Quebec.

We must acknowledge that most statues imported from Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries were greatly superior, in terms of their elegance and refinement, to any derivative examples produced locally. The disparity becomes evident when comparing the silver *Vierge* of the Sulpicians, mentioned earlier, to its copies, especially the one from Saint-Paul de Joliette, attributed to Saint-James. As a second example, we contrast the sensual and noble charm of a work such as the *Vierge à l'Enfant* (acquired 1849 by the church in Varennes) to the unaccomplished aesthetic of the *Vierge à l'Enfant* (circa 1815) by Urbain Brien dit Desrochers (1781-1860). A similar comparison could be made using almost any Canadian statuary work from the period for that matter.

The perception that European models represented academic perfection, could only cause the faithful and, moreover, the patrons, to find fault in Quebec statuary art especially because clerics had increasingly frequent opportunities, from about 1840 onwards, to visit (or return to) Europe where they could appreciate the famous works in situ. This observation of the local production's weaknesses, combined with factors such as a loyalty to the mother country and to the European (Roman) Catholic "universe" (in true ultramontane fashion), explains the renewed infatuation that the country was experiencing for European art -- this went so far that old world artists were being encouraged to immigrate.

A 19-year old Italian named Hector Vacca was among those who set up their practice in Montreal. He had been prompted to come to Montreal in 1847 by *Grand-Vicaire* Hudon and bishop Bourget, however, he died only a few months after his arrival. The press lamented the loss of this skilful young artist, claiming that he could have trained "jeunes artistes canadiens qui se seraient distingués dans cette branche et auraient fait honneur au pays." The expression of these frustrated hopes for an artist who could have raised young Canadian statuary artists to glory reveals a dissatisfaction not only with local instruction, but also with the artists it produced. Likewise, the premature death of the young Joliette sculptor Anatole Parthenais (1839-64) was mourned by many. He had shown considerable promise, having successfully completed two years of study at the *École Impériale des Beaux-Arts* in Paris.

This attitude ensured that some important commissions be awarded to foreign sculptors. Consequently, Montreal today has several original works by established French academic sculptors. These include the wood statues at Notre-Dame Basilica that were scaled-up by Chesneau (1875) from prototypes by Salon-honoured artist Henri Bouriché. A later example, by Parisian Joseph Lefèvre (member of the *Société des Artistes français*), is the gold-plated bronze *Immaculée Conception* (1904) which tops Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Chapel, a work conceived especially for Montreal.

Olindo Gratton, by specializing in religious statues, participated in the 19th century academic tradition as much as those who practiced a purely secular art. When confronted by the plethora of languid slaves, allegorical figures, bourgeois busts and patriotic statues that populated 19th century Salons, it is easily forgotten that religious works also constituted an important component of official sculptural practice. This was especially true in Catholic or highly Catholicized countries in Europe. In fact, the many large architectural projects for which the 19th century is known -- the Madeleine in Paris, the Cathedral in Marseille as well as Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde Church in that same city, and Sacré-Cœur Basilica in Montmartre -- required embellishment, which would ultimately be executed by some of the most reputed academic sculptors of the time.

New statuary models came to be invented by some of the sculptors working on such projects. Some examples are Jean-Marie-Bienaimé Bonnassieux's gigantic *Notre-Dame-de-France* (Le Puy, 1860), a sculpture on which Bouriché collaborated; Joseph Fabisch's famous *Immaculée Conception* (Lourdes, Massabielle Grotto), a statue which Louis Jobin often reproduced in Quebec; and Eugène-Louis Lequesne's colossal *Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde* (Marseille, 1867), a copy of which dominates the tower of the *Congrégation de Notre-Dame's* former motherhouse in Montreal.

Gratton worked in this context. His was therefore a learned art practice, one that was consciously academic and referential. His sources were drawn from Western art, among which were works contemporary to the artist. Like Louis Jobin, he derived inspiration from the standardized production of the time, and borrowed from sales catalogues distributed by European and American statue manufacturers. By "imitating," he was in fact participating in the stylistic Revival movement of the time.

Gratton's patrons would sometimes specify the prototype on which he was required to base his work. He was given an illustration to copy for his *Sainte Anne* (Fall River, Massachusetts, 1905), and in 1913 he created a sculptural group entitled *Saint Joseph, gardien du pain de vie*

for the Servantes de Jésus-Marie (Hull), following the directions of the Chaplain and the Mother Superior.

Fewer constraints seem to have been imposed upon him for other projects. From 1907 to 1909, for example, he worked on a commission for the statuary of the facade of Saint-Enfant-Jésus Church (Montreal). The church's priest, Canon Lepailleur, conceived the theme that the facade's architect, Joseph Venne, integrated into his plan, but the drawings only vaguely described the works which Gratton would create.

Though Gratton relied heavily on borrowing, he was never satisfied to slavishly duplicate models. Consider, for example, the *Ecce Homo* and the *Baiser de Judas* (Montreal, Notre-Dame Basilica, 1892), which recall the marble works by Ignazio Jacometti (Rome, Scala Santa, 1854 and 1855), and the *Cène* (Outremont, Saint-Viateur Church, 1923), which borrows from Da Vinci. The originality of both the physiognomy and the draping in these works, indicates that Gratton used real-life models -- probably asking anyone at hand to sit for him. We recognize the features of one of the artist's nieces in the four *Anges aux guirlandes* (1910), which decorate the canopy of the Montreal cathedral, and it is believed that Gratton served as his own model for some works, including his *Saint Isidore le laboureur* (1933), commissioned by the Clercs de Saint-Viateur of Sully.

In the final analysis, Olindo Gratton's religious works thus remain personalized, despite their being consciously referential and codified. They exemplify a sculptural practice which reflected the established ideologies of the period. A study of Gratton's production helps us to understand that the religio-cultural situation in Montreal and in the province as a whole was evolving, not in a state of isolation, but as an active participant in a larger cultural context.

## Biographical Study

### 1. An Artist to Be (1855-1888)

#### *Background*

Joseph-Olindo Gratton was born, the son of a farmer, on November 23, 1855, in Sainte-Thérèse-de-Blainville. The young Olindo began classical studies in 1869 at the Petit Séminaire in Sainte-Thérèse; by the end of the school year, he had distinguished himself in French reading, grammar, and violin. Violin was an elective -- so was drawing, a subject which he might have taken for the first time. The drawing course had been restructured in 1865 by Joseph Chabert, who was a former student at the École Impériale des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and a recent immigrant to Quebec. Chabert would later play a key role in the instruction of the arts in Montreal.

Olindo did not go any further in his classical studies. Instead, in 1871, he moved to Montreal, probably with the intention of gaining employment in the small leather industry, which had already attracted other members of his family. This was a time of a large exodus of people from the country to the city. Olindo's aptitude for language and art led him to enrol in the École Normale Jacques-Cartier around 1872-73, a school which was able to offer him a solid education. Napoléon Bourassa had taught drawing there in 1862 -- in 1873-74, this course was offered by someone by the name of L'Hérault.

#### *Apprenticeship*

Around 1872-73, Olindo entered into the atelier of Montreal sculptor Charles Dauphin. A career in sculpture must have seemed promising in Montreal at the time because, despite an

economic recession, many churches were under construction. Dauphin's atelier was the most renowned in the francophone milieu and it received a great variety of commissions, two factors which made it the most desirable place for apprenticing sculptors.

Dauphin had done his apprenticeship with Urbain Brien dit Desrochers. In 1849, he accepted Augustin Buteau into his atelier; he also trained J.-Arthur Vincent (1852-1903), as well as J.-Lucien-Alfred Benoit (1850-1935). Joseph Brunet (1857-?) began his apprenticeship at the same time as Gratton. At the time of the master's death in 1874, his three sons were also working in the atelier. The atelier's traditional bias gave Gratton the opportunity to acquire the basics of ornamental sculpture while working on projects which may have included the three altars for Pictou that the atelier produced in 1874. In addition, it is possible that Gratton was introduced to wood statuary by Dauphin, given that the atelier had undertaken a commission to carve a *Sainte-Famille* for the Nazareth Chapel in Montreal (circa 1870-72). Subsequently, Gratton formed a company with Dauphin's youngest son, the architect Joseph-Arthur-Henri (1856-?). He was probably put in charge of ornamental carpentry and fine wood-working. We are unaware of any of their projects; however, we do know that HA. [*sic*] Dauphin signed plans for a *De Maisonneuve* memorial (1879).

The first statues that Gratton carved were six religious works (1877-79); the pretext for their production remains unknown. At this time, any aspiring statuary artists who desired academic training were able to take courses at the Council of Arts and Manufactures' school or at the Institut National des Beaux-Arts. These schools initially catered to working class tradesmen, but, by the end of the 19th century, the majority of the area's French-Canadian artists had studied there. François-C. Van Luppen taught sculptural modelling at the Council's school from 1876 to 1882, while at the rival school, sculpture was taught by Ernest Cleff from 1874 to 1876. As for private instruction, it should be pointed out that Bourassa, with the help of Louis-Philippe Hébert, wanted to found a school of sculpture and statuary art (1879).

Gratton was not one of Bourassa's apprentices during the Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Chapel (Montreal) project, as were Hébert and his former colleague Benoit, but the circumstances were such that he would soon have more contact with the master. In 1881, Gratton began working for Hébert, in Bourassa's atelier.

In 1883, in the company of these two founding members of the Canadian Academy of Arts, Gratton, the artisan, discovered within himself his identity as an "artist" or "artist-sculptor." The artistic recognition that Bourassa and Hébert enjoyed showed that pursuing religious themes did not necessarily result in exclusion from the official contemporary art milieu. The power of Bourassa's erudition and personality most likely made a deep impression on Gratton, the master providing him with an intellectual base for his work to come -- the aesthetic that Bourassa advocated served the dominant ideology, which was "religion and loyalty to one's native land" (*Religion et Patrie*). In light of the above, we can consider Gratton to be one of the disciples of Bourassa, alongside the master's pupils Hébert and François-Édouard Meloche.

#### *"Foreman of the Atelier"*

Hébert set up his own atelier around 1882. While in his service, Gratton looked to Hébert to increase his knowledge of statuary, and we believe he even assumed the position as the atelier's foreman; the experience he already possessed qualified him for this position. This is our interpretation given that his colleague Philippe Laperle (1860-1934), had joined the atelier in 1882, only as a novice. While in the service of Hébert's prolific workshop, Gratton had the opportunity to practice various types of wood sculpture (ornamental and statuary, religious and secular) and it is possible that he oversaw the preparation of the models and moulds required in bronze casting. His sculptural achievements from this time include a significant contribution to the statuary of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Ottawa (1879-87). His name is also associated with the production of the altar of the old Saint-Jacques Church in Montreal (circa 1885-88) and the statues of the *Chaire de Vérité* of Notre-Dame Basilica in Montreal (1883-87).

From a stylistic point of view, it is difficult to distinguish Gratton's contribution to these works. (His later works would be characterized by a certain rigidity and linear quality that are, in fact, inherent to wood sculpture.)

Gratton was both Hébert's employee and student. In 1883-84, he took Hébert's sculptural modelling course, and in 1886 he took an anatomy course which Hébert was teaching at the Council's school (Laperle also took these courses). The idea of acquiring work-related training in an academic context was indicative of the changes that the small ateliers were undergoing at the time. Gratton might also have attended the Institut National around 1885-87. At that time, Chabert was focusing his instruction on artistic creation. This would have provided Gratton with a welcome complement to the training of a very practical nature offered at the Council's school.

## 2. Sculptor in Montreal (1888-1901)

### *The Atelier Gratton et Laperle*

In 1888, Hébert went to Paris; he would not permanently return to Montreal until 1894. Olindo Gratton and Philippe Laperle took over their employer's atelier, located on *rue Labelle*. Laperle was a fast learner. By 1884, he was able to fill Hébert's position as professor of wood sculpture in the Council's school; soon after he most likely became a close assistant to Gratton. Both men thus possessed the necessary expertise in religious sculpture to carry on in Hébert's absence.

In a move to retain the confidence of the atelier's previous clientele, Gratton and Laperle displayed two of their productions in the storefront windows of Montreal businesses during the summer of 1888; this was a common marketing strategy at the time. Although Gratton and Laperle were now autonomous entrepreneurs, they would still produce two cement high reliefs for Hébert -- based on his ideas -- that were intended for the facade of Saint-Henri-des-Tanneries Church in Montreal (1888-90). Like Hébert, they contributed statuary work to the projects of architects Perrault and Mesnard on several occasions. Examples include the twelve statues for the chancel of Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours Chapel (Montreal, 1889-90) and a *Saint-Henri* for the Saint-Henri Church (1890).

*La Presse*, the French language daily, and *Le Monde Illustré* magazine published, in 1889 and 1890 respectively, laudatory articles on the two associates, considering them in the context of the current art scene. Concurrently, *Le Monde Illustré* took a particular interest in an exhibition of works by francophone artists (held at the former "Salle Cavallo") and in the careers of Hébert and Alexandre Carli.

For unknown reasons, Gratton and Laperle separated around 1891. Gratton continued at the studio on *rue Labelle*, while Laperle became affiliated with the ornamental sculptor Alfred Lefrançois. Around 1893, Elzéar Soucy (1876-1970) was brought into the atelier of Lefrançois and Laperle. Laperle was then busy working on the colossal statues for the apsidal tower of Bonsecours. After this project, he disappeared from view. Given that he and Gratton were similarly competent, it seems strange that Laperle's career should end so abruptly.

### *"Diocesan Sculptor"*

The years from 1891 to 1901 marked a very fruitful period for Gratton. He was no longer associated with Laperle, but he remained Hébert's tenant until 1894. In May 1891, following Hébert's example, he attempted to break into the new market for patriotic statues with the

creation of the first commemorative statuette of *Monseigneur* Antoine Labelle, the well-known priest of Saint-Jérôme. Gratton surely would have preferred to erect a permanent memorial fitted with a bronze statue, however, his efforts did lead to two temporary memorials situated at Lake Labelle (1894) and at Saint-Ignace du Nominingue (1898).<sup>1</sup>

[Footnote 1: Gratton's statuette was also used as the prototype for the *Labelle Monument*, erected in Labelle in 1955.]

The prevailing ideology of the time increasingly favoured art that was dedicated to important figures in national history. With his *Labelle*, Gratton attempted to participate in this trend, thus hoping to gain access to a market that promised more money and longer-lasting success than the religious art market could ever offer. The latter, suffering from a lack of funds, only permitted the use of the most economical materials (wood and plaster versus bronze). Gratton would never attain the success in patriotic sculpture that he had hoped for.

On the other hand, it appears that his efforts in this field had the effect of strengthening his reputation as a religious statuary. In 1891-92, Father Sentenne (Notre-Dame, Montreal) entrusted him with the production of numerous ornaments and two wood angels for Notre-Dame's Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur Chapel. Encouraged by Sentenne's support, Gratton went on to carve two sculptural groups in 1892: one of these was a life-size *Ecce Homo* that would guard the Chapel's entrance until the fire of 1978. This commission gave Gratton the same standing as the other artists (painters) who Sentenne had brought together to decorate the Chapel. Gratton's association with a project of such a high calibre must have been influential in his being awarded, in 1892, a commission to execute the first of the thirteen colossal copper-on-wood repoussé statues that he would make for the present-day Marie-Reine-du-Monde et Saint-Jacques-le-Majeur Cathedral-Basilica. This series (1892-93 and 1898-1900) marks the culminating point of his career. Although the names of some other artists have been associated with a few of these works, all thirteen, in fact are by Gratton.

The immensity of this project exemplifies the large religious and patriotic commissions about which Bourassa had dreamed. The Cathedral was conceived as a miniature Saint Peter's in Rome by Montreal bishop Ignace Bourget. It stands as Quebec's most significant architectural and iconographic statement of the ultramontane ideology. With its allusion to the pontifical see, it occupies the most privileged position in the hierarchy of churches in Quebec. Compared to other architectural achievements of the time, it is rivalled only by the Palais législatif in Quebec City, which also boasts statuary on its facade.

The Cathedral's special impact lies in its statuary, an important part of the building's symbolism. While the sculptures in Rome represent Christ and his apostles, those on the Cathedral-Basilica represent several saints. The presence of these saints affirms the divine origin of the Church, which gives its bishops the role of teaching the precepts of Christian life. This authority is transferred to the Montreal episcopate, who guides the faithful, who are represented -- notably -- by the donors, who in turn represent the entire hierarchy of the diocese. The message revolves around the life of Christ, which the faithful are encouraged to imitate following Franciscan virtues. Ripe with meaning, this statuary remains unique in the context of Quebec's monumental religious sculpture.

In the same genre, Gratton produced patron saints for several of the diocese's churches. He also carved eleven statues for the chapel of the Petit Séminaire in Sainte-Thérèse (circa 1897-99). Almost all the commissions Gratton received were related to the production of works for major construction and renovation projects; these statues were, for the most part, connected to the principal devotion of the respective church. Enjoying a high profile, Gratton was amongst the Montrealers who visited, in 1893, the Chicago World's Colombian Exposition, and then, around 1895, he was included in a biographical listing of businessmen, published in conjunction with the unveiling of the *De Maisonneuve Memorial* (Hébert, Montreal).

Gratton found success during this period, despite the economic crisis that had hit Montreal, but it was probably out of financial necessity that he marketed a small plaster bust of Sir

Wilfrid Laurier in 1896. His teaching positions throughout the decade were probably also a response to the recession.

### *Teacher*

In 1887, Gratton temporarily replaced Hébert as instructor of the sculptural modelling course at the Council of Arts and Manufactures' school. In 1894, he took over Arthur Vincent's modelling and wood sculpture course at the same school. Gratton headed this course until 1899, sharing the position with Hébert from 1895 to 1898 (only the modelling component was offered after 1897). In 1895, the Council moved several of its classes, including Gratton's, to the Monument National, which was the new headquarters of the Association Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Montreal, an organization which shared the same educational objectives as the Council. Gratton and Hébert taught at this location alongside painters Meloche, Edmond Dyonnet and Joseph Saint-Charles.

The shared teaching arrangement between Hébert and Gratton left the theoretical component to the former, while the latter supervised the execution of projects. This arrangement ensured that Gratton continue to have the opportunity to pass on his vast technical knowledge to the students. During his last year at the school, the artist was the sole teacher of modelling -- this demonstrates the confidence that the Council had in him.

In 1899, he ceded his position to Alexandre Carli. The demands placed on him by his statuary work for the Cathedral is undoubtedly the reason for his leaving the school. As a professor at the Council's school, Gratton takes his place in the succession of artists who provided an academic education to sculptors in Montreal -- from Napoléon Bourassa through Elzéar Soucy (who taught until the Council's dissolution in 1928). This material is certainly open to further historic research.

Gratton must have enjoyed teaching. Few documents supply information on the courses that he taught, however, there are a few exceptions: the annual report that he prepared for the administration in 1887, in which he explains the interrelationship between drawing and modelling; and a few articles appearing in the Montreal press during 1897 and 1898, which similarly saw drawing and modelling to be complementary disciplines.

The Reader will find in *Tableau C* (p. 101) a partial and somewhat hypothetical, list of Gratton's students: noteworthy in 1887 are Cullen and George W. Hill (1862-1934), and in 1898-99, Alfred Laliberté. As their professor, Gratton would have offered these artists the foundation necessary for the art of sculpture. The most well-known among the remaining students is Elzéar Soucy. It seems that it was this artist who would, through his lengthy teaching career in Montreal, most faithfully pass on the teachings of Gratton. The more obscure artists from this list who practiced sculpture around 1900, and others such as Cléophas Soucy (1879-1960), who was a stone carver, would certainly be worthy of historical research.

Gratton may also have sculpted ornaments used to decorate hearses. The sculptor also appears to have prepared models for stone carvers. Such collaborations include the production of the *Granger Memorial* (1900), which was conceived by Meloche for Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery in Montreal. Several years later, Elzéar Soucy would remark that any sculptor hoping to survive had to be versatile.

### 3. Sculptor in Sainte-Thérèse (1901-1941)

#### *Years of Perseverance*

Around 1901, family obligations forced Olindo Gratton to move back to Sainte-Thérèse. Still unmarried, he lived from that time on with an older sister, who was also single. To mark his

Bernard Mulaire, *Olindo Gratton (1855-1941) – Religion et sculpture* [Exerpt: English summary]

return, some friends published an overview of Gratton's career in the Montreal press. This sensitive gesture may have led to his being awarded the contract for the *Joliette Monument* (Joliette, 1902). Although the statue for this monument would be executed in copper repoussé, a medium of less integrity than bronze, the contract still represented an achievement for Gratton in his ambition to find a place in the commemorative market. He would meet with several refusals before he would have another chance to work in this genre.

Some projects, such as the bust of Marguerite Bourgeoys (1914), allowed him to bring together both religious and secular commemorative sculpture -- the personalities depicted were canonized at a later date. Religious statuary remained the most profitable genre for Gratton because it repeatedly demanded his mastery of repoussé on wood. This technique offered an economical, although less durable, alternative to bronze casting. Louis Jobin practiced the art of repoussé in the Quebec City area, following the lead of European sculptors such as Geoffroy de Chaume and Bartholdi. In Montreal, Philippe Laperle and Arthur Vincent worked in this technique, the latter advocating a variation of *repoussé en coquille*.

Gratton employed his expertise in metal-on-wood repoussé in the realization of works such as *Sainte-Anne* (Fall River, Massachusetts, 1905) as well as the exterior statuary of Saint-Enfant-Jésus Church (Montreal, 1907-09). The iconographic complexity of the latter work, which is based on "The Redemption," make it an outstanding contribution to the history of Quebec religious art. Unfortunately, in 1978, most of this work was removed from the church after suffering damage caused by the elements. Still using the same technique, Gratton created the six angels that top the canopy that Vincent built for Montreal's Marie-Reine-du-Monde Cathedral (1910-11). Vincent's intention was to create a miniature replica of Bernini's *baldacchino* in the Vatican Basilica. The commissioning of these angels coincided with the 21st International Eucharistic Congress (Montreal, 1910). *Ange*, sculpted for the church in Sainte-Thérèse a year earlier, was thematically connected to the event.

Revived by that experience, Gratton participated in the Salon organized by the Club Saint-Denis (Montreal, 1911). Through this event the club intended to offer talented French-Canadian artists with an alternative to the Art Association's exhibitions. Gratton was not the star attraction, but he was one of the senior members of the fifty predominantly professional artists represented. The subjects of the works that he exhibited were exemplary of his continued attempts to break into the market for patriotic bronzes. It must be understood that the demand for wood sculpture had been continually shrinking since the mid-19th century under the onslaught of industrialization. As quicker and more economical production methods became more widespread, plaster statuary entered competition with mass-production.

Forced to adapt to these circumstances, it seems that Gratton occasionally produced statuary prototypes, probably for the T. Carli atelier in Montreal (where Alfred Laliberté worked in 1907-08). A plaster work that Gratton produced for the Servantes de Jésus-Marie (Hull, 1913), was reproduced by a Carli shop, and another plaster work, an *Ange adoreur* (circa 1913-16), may also be the result of such a collaboration. The last work is noteworthy because it allows us to tentatively attribute two *Anges adoreurs*, previously at Saint-Pierre-Claver Church (Montreal), to Gratton. This war-time period was one of difficulty for the artist and he may have had to take on woodworking jobs to survive. In 1917, the Alumni monthly of the Petit Séminaire in Sainte-Thérèse included an article on Gratton which might have resulted in his solo exhibition at the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice in Montreal (1918).

This exhibition was part of a series organized by priest Olivier Maurault. From the time of the Bibliothèque's unveiling in 1915 to the end of the 1920s, all better known French-speaking Montreal artists had exhibited there. Gratton showed twelve works, a few of which were of a religious nature. The overall commemorative content of the exhibition, indicative of Gratton's ever-present ambition, pleased the daily newspapers. However the artist received a harsh commentary in *Le Nigog*.

*Le Nigog* was a Montreal-based magazine of artistic and literary criticism founded by young "Parisianistes" who were friends of Maurault. The publication became a landmark in the history of Modernity in Quebec by demanding specialized art criticism. One of the magazine's chief

writers indirectly accused Gratton of amateurishness. Given that the magazine advocated the appreciation of art's plastic quality to the detriment of its subject (an element it did not, however, totally reject), it was not in a position to appreciate Gratton's essentially ideological art, which was situated within an academic (albeit rather old-fashioned) beaux-arts discourse. In spite of everything, the high-profile exhibition had a positive effect on his career, helping him to re-establish his position as the principal sculptor of wood religious statues in the Montreal area.

### *The Re-Launching of a Career*

The 1920s were years of unexpected activity for Gratton, given his age at the time. In 1920-21, he produced four colossal *Anges à la trompette* in copper-on-wood repoussé for Saint-Louis-de-France Church (Montreal). Reminiscent of the angels at Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde (Marseille), these works inspired several other projects, such as the *Saint Joseph Memorial* by Laliberté at the Oratoire du Mont-Royal (Montreal, 1923). In 1922, Gratton filled another out-of-country order, undoubtedly obtained through the net-work of "wandering" *Québécois*, this time for an *Ecce Homo* for San Diego, California. It is possible that this sculpture ended up in Mexico, thus explaining claims that works were done by the artist for this country.

Other works produced in this period include sculptures commissioned for church decoration projects in Montreal and Outremont, both late examples of the Quebec tradition of spectacular wood interiors. For Saint-Viateur Church, Gratton carved a *Cène* (1923) and fifty-four statuettes representing various pontiffs (1926-27). For Sainte-Catherine-d'Alexandrie, he made eight low reliefs (1926) depicting biblical scenes, eighteen medallions representing prophets (1928), and a *Calvaire* (1929), which was one of his better works prior to its dismantling in 1972. Finally, for Sainte-Madeleine Church, Gratton sculpted an impressive *Christ en croix* (1930), as well as four *Anges adoreurs* which we attribute to him (circa 1930-33).

Gratton was overwhelmed by the support of his religious clientele when he was offered the opportunity to realize his greatest dream: to prepare a statue that would be cast in bronze (1925). The subject of the work was the founder of the Petit Séminaire in Sainte-Thérèse, priest Charles-Joseph Ducharme. The statue's pedestal was designed by Joseph Sawyer of Montreal. This memorial, which was unveiled at the institution's centennial festivities, still stands today in front of the former college, now the Collège Lionel-Groulx. Gratton expressed his gratitude by designing four low reliefs illustrating the college's historic edifices -- executed by Colomban Gratton. Around 1926-29, Gratton expressed further thanks by using the college's past and present superiors as subjects for several plaster busts and for two excellent bronze medallions intended for funerary monuments in Sainte-Thérèse.

Gratton's authority as a sculptor was acknowledged by several of the period's publications, one example being the *Biographies Canadiennes-françaises* (1927). Although Olivier Maurault, in his *Marges d'histoire* (1928-29), described Gratton as exemplary of the tradition of wood sculpture (Louis Jobin, according to Maurault, held this role in Quebec City), he recognized a certain versatility in the sculptor by mentioning him in the context of an essentially secular statuary practice. However, it is surprising that, in the hierarchy he created, he placed Gratton below his former student, Elzéar Soucy. One possible explanation for this is offered by Alfred Laliberté's memoir, *Les artistes de mon temps*, written around 1926-41.

Laliberté felt that Gratton was more of an artisan than an artist. Although he recognized the quality of the *Ducharme Memorial*, he believed that Gratton lacked good judgement, imagination and expertise, which ultimately prevented him from winning competitions. We admit that Gratton's maquettes were often bombastic, but it must be remembered that this weakness is attributable to an aesthetic heritage strongly influenced by Bourassa, and to deficiencies in his strictly local art training. Given that Laliberté had benefited from advanced training in Paris, his words reflect the 19th century sculpture debate which opposed "modellers" with "carvers," the former being the conceiver (artists) of the work, the latter

being the technical executants (artisans). Modernism would later end this debate in favour of "carvers," in the belief that carving was more true to the material employed.

It had become highly desirable in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for Quebec artists to complete their education by undertaking advanced studies in Paris. For those who did not do so, it was almost impossible to break into the commemorative market for bronzes in Quebec. Gratton suffered from this handicap, lending further support to Laliberté's vision of him as an artisan; a perception that existed despite the fact that both men adhered to the period's conservative ideology.

Maurault's position with regards to Gratton was more ambiguous. Although he shared with Laliberté both an appreciation of the criteria applied to art in France, and a dissatisfaction with the weaknesses in Gratton's secular production (which led to his ranking Soucy higher than Gratton), he had to, as a cleric, show respect toward the diocese's senior statuary specialist. This explains his granting Gratton an exhibition of his work at the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice. We must also take into consideration the fact that at this time religious art still enjoyed a significant following. Not only Alexandre Carli, but also Hébert and Laliberté, continued to execute religious work from time to time. Ideologically, "religion" and "loyalty to one's native land" were still inseparable and both still legitimized religious and patriotic commemoration. The concept of this ideological function of art was supported by Frère Martinus' essay on aesthetics, *La Connaissance pratique du beau* (Montreal, 1924), which echoed Bourassa's viewpoints. In actual fact, since such a great deal of Gratton's art filled the needs of the Church (even most of his commemorative works served to honour men of the cloth), he was worthy of the respect of someone like Maurault.

#### *Career's End*

At the beginning of the 1930s, Gratton practically ceased all statuary activity due to his old age and the period's economic crisis. A few younger sculptors, such as Lauréat Vallière (1888-1973) in Saint-Romuald, continued their work, taking part in the revival of religious art that occurred during this decade. The new generation of wood sculptors interested in religious art and supportive of the movement included such artists as Médard Bourgault (1897-1967) of Saint-Jean-Port-Joli. Elzéar Soucy and Jean-Marie Gauvreau, colleagues at the École du Meuble in Montreal, and ethnologist Marius Barbeau supported this movement. Their involvement was a response to the nationalistic aspirations disseminated by priest Lionel Groulx, who was attempting to legitimize French-Canadian society through reference to a mythical French peasant past. Barbeau, in subscribing to this ideology, favoured sculptors based in the area of Quebec City (the city believed to be the quintessential example of untainted French-Canadian culture) to the detriment of artists based in cosmopolitan Montreal -- Gratton included. As for Gauvreau, he advocated a local cottage industry that would be geared towards a tourist clientele. This plan, although potentially profitable, did not serve the interests of Gratton, a statuary trained in the grand style.

For the Clercs de Saint-Viateur's agricultural college in Sully, Gratton produced what is considered to be his last religious sculpture, a *Saint-Isidore le laboureur* in copper-on-wood repoussé. This work is a reflection of the period's "ruralist" movement, and we believe it is a self-portrait. It stands as a kind of spiritual and artistic finishing touch to his main career. Forced to change his rhythm, Gratton passed his time working on busts of political figures. Nevertheless, he did produce ornamental sculpture for a few churches north of Montreal (around 1936-38), in collaboration with the E. Thibault atelier in Sainte-Thérèse. Gérard Morisset's impression of Gratton as an ornamental sculptor of the old school, as published in *Coup d'œil* (1941), is probably based on these minor works.

Through his loyalty to the period's nationalist ideology, which praised all things *nouvelle-francienne* in Quebec society, Morisset was unable to appreciate the 19th century academic influences that predominate in Gratton's statuary production. A more accurate view of him appeared in *Histoire des Beaux-Arts. Notions*, published by the Sœurs des Saints Noms de

Jésus et de Marie (Outremont, 1937). Recalling the writings of Olivier Maurault, the book ranked Gratton, the sculptor of the statues at the Montreal Cathedral, lower than Anatole Parthenais, Dauphin, Bourassa, and Louis-Philippe and Henri Hébert, but higher than Laliberté, Suzor-Coté, Elzéar Soucy, and others of the like.

Gratton had other preoccupations at the time, as is proven by a strange symbolical-allegorical grouping that he made in plaster, purely for his own pleasure. The work, *Le Spectre de la guerre* (1936-39), had specific social implications and echoed Alfred Laliberté's *L'Ère de la mécanique* (1934): this period was, after all, one where the relevance of the artist making such a social commentary in his/her work was being rediscovered. Gratton lived his last years conscious of the passing of time. In 1938, he received interviewers from the *Inventaire des œuvres d'art du Québec* and, in 1939-40, his fellow citizens had a biographical account of his life published both in the press and in a historical document on Sainte-Thérèse. The sculptor occupied himself with the execution of a medallion of Pius XII (1939), as well as with a local project that would have included his bust of Sir J.-A. Chapleau as part of a memorial -- the project was cancelled due to the war. On October 28, 1941, Gratton entered the Hospice Drapeau in Sainte-Thérèse, where he would die on November 14 of the same year. City Hall lowered its flag in his honour. The local and Montreal presses emphasized the religious character of his work. At the beginning of 1942, the Petit Séminaire received a bequest on Olindo Gratton's behalf, which included some thirty works in wood, plaster and clay. This gesture, along with that of the donation of the *Chapleau* bust to the Société historique, were expressions of Gratton's gratitude toward the society in which he had lived, and through these bequests, he made public his desire to pass on to future generations the values that he upheld throughout his life.

## Conclusion

The death of Olindo Gratton, *auxiliaire de la religion*, did not represent the end of religious statuary production in Quebec any more than did the death of Louis Jobin in 1928. Besides Elzéar Soucy, Bourgault and Vallière, new generations of sculptors would want to provide the Quebec Church with its icons. The work of sculptors steeped in the ideals of the religious art revival movement -- such as Armand Fillion (born 1906), Marius Plamondon (1914-76), Louis Parent (1908-82), Sylvia Daoust (born 1902), Max Boucher (1918-75), and Émile Brunet -- were featured in *Arts et pensée* magazine (Montreal) at the beginning of the 1950s. Through their discovery of the material's expressive qualities, they would contribute to the evolution of Quebec sculpture within the context of Modernity. Just the same, their truthfulness to subject matter and to fine textures would recall the academic aesthetic that Gratton employed. This constitutes another chapter in the history of Quebec art -- it has yet to be written.

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