

# Artists declare a State of Emergency

*Performance art in Montreal to shed a new light on homelessness, social norms*

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A group of artists is erecting what it calls a “refugee camp” in a downtown Montreal square to draw attention to the plight of the city’s homeless and exhibit their latest art installations.

Beginning Tuesday, the activist-art group Socially Acceptable Terrorist Action (ATSA) will present this year’s State of Emergency event at Place Emile-Gamelin. Over the course of five days, ATSA will provide free meals, winter clothes, and a tent for night-time sleeping.

But the space will not only be reserved for Montreal’s homeless population; dozens of non-homeless performance artists and circus performers will bring the event’s unique artistic flair to the square’s stage and tents.

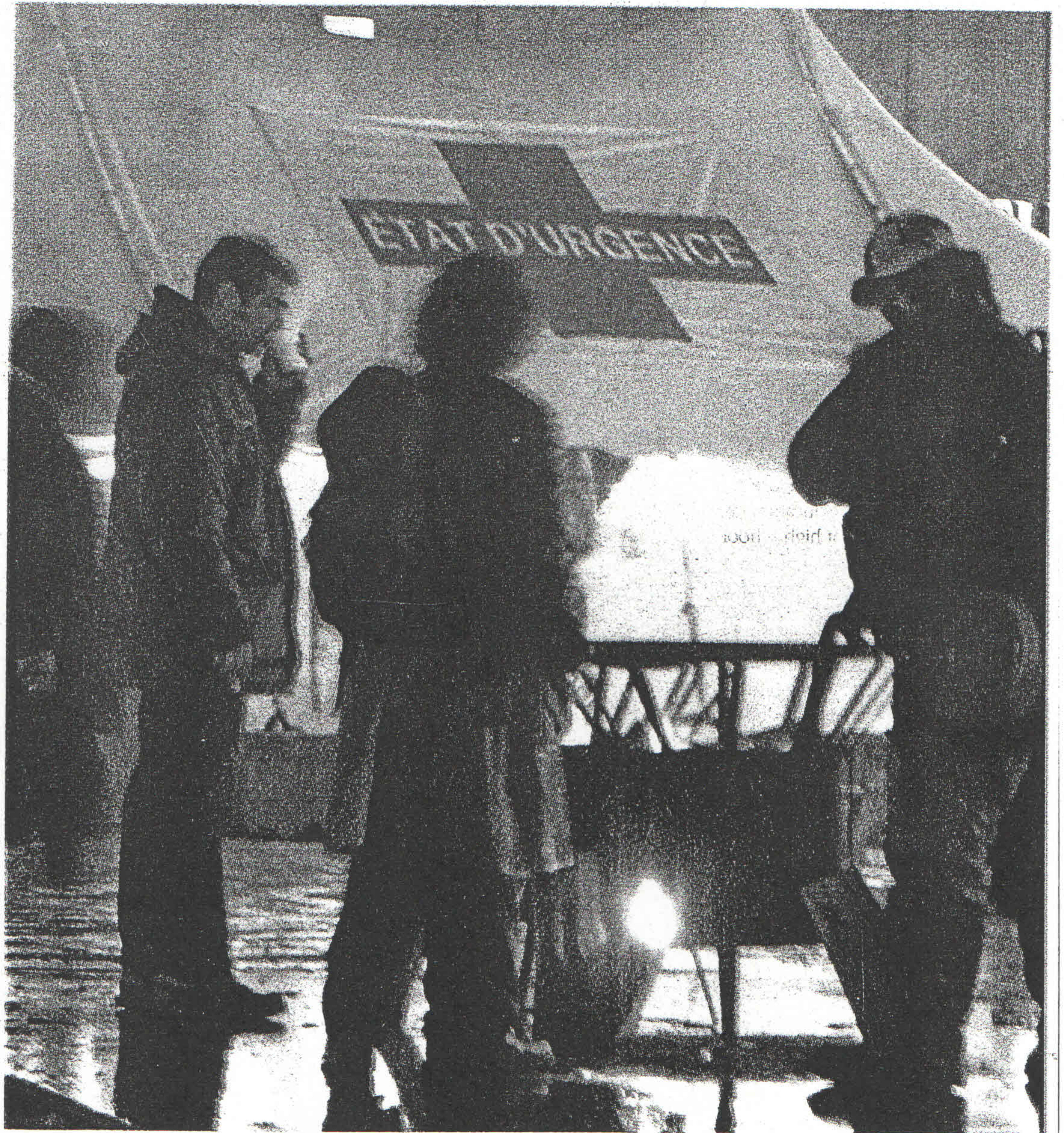
According to Annie Roy, a Montreal artist who co-founded ATSA in 1997, the aim is to form a bond between Montrealers who might not normally associate with one another. At State of Emergency, people with homes as well as people living on the streets will share communal meals and take part in interactive art installations – some of which are as simple as an outdoor ping-pong game.

“By exchanging a ball, you’re exchanging a moment,” Roy explained. “You’ll inevitably laugh or strike up a conversation.”

Other performance art events include Victoria Stanton’s Essen, which requests that passers-by pair up and feed each other a meal. Inviting another person to take part in such an intimate event, Stanton explains, breaks down one’s day-to-day “autopilot.”

“I have no idea how it’s going to be received because our relationship with food is such a personal one, whether we have food or not,” she said, adding that for those who feel uncomfortable, food will be offered with no strings attached.

A central element of Stanton’s work is that it not necessarily be seen as art – a theme that Stefan St-Laurent’s performance will share. St-Laurent, an



Josh Chapman / The McGill Daily

**ATSA will take over Place Emile-Gamelin this week in a mad fusion of art and activism.**

artist based in Ottawa, will ask homeless people to carry him over their shoulders while he acts dazed.

“I’ll be in the arms of a strong man and the image will look like a rescue,” St-Laurent explained. “It’s a reverse situation – a homeless person is saving me.”

St-Laurent and his homeless collaborators, whom he will pay, will roam city streets without explaining the

nature of their rescue re-enactment.

“There won’t be that direct link made with homelessness and I don’t know if that’s important, because the image of two people – one dressed preppy and the other homeless – in an intimate position will still get out there,” St-Laurent said.

Though he wasn’t aware of the particular performances being put on at the State of Emergency, Jean-

Claude Laporte, an organizer with the anti-poverty group FRAPRU, said that any act that could make homelessness a public issue was beneficial.

“We prefer to do that through political pressure and they do that artistically, but in the end it’s not up to FRAPRU or ATSA to fix the problems. That’s the government’s job.”