

The Main alive with frags

HISTORY COMES TO ST. LAURENT BLVD.

Landmarks decorated with maps, photos, old documents to remind us what used to be

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THE GAZETTE

Do you know when Montrealers first called St. Laurent Blvd. the Main?

And did you know Canada accepted the first wave of Portuguese immigrants who settled on the Main as an experiment to see if they could adapt to the climate?

Montreal's most famous thoroughfare overflows with history, says the Société de développement du boulevard Saint-Laurent, the street's chamber of commerce. Yesterday, it put up 22 "fragments" of its annals to keep that history alive.

Called FRAG, the project is a strolling tour of the street's evolution.

Posters splashed with photos, drawings, maps, old documents,

and historical tidbits at 22 landmarks invite passers-by to see the Main as it used to be.

"For years, people said there should be a tour to explain what St. Laurent is all about," said Audrey Lefebvre, a spokesperson for the Société. "We know many of its buildings are landmarks, but we don't know how or why."

The Société teamed up with artists Annie Roy and Pierre Allard, whose mandate is to bring art into the street and to challenge people to question their surroundings.

"St. Laurent is the meeting point of different cultures," Roy said. "It's the heart of Montreal."

To make the posters – or "frags" – as eclectic as the street, Roy and Allard perused old pictures, historical archives and public records for anything that

captured the spirit of the Main. They turned those documents into fragmented collages.

"When you see an image of the past, it makes you interested to see how things were," Roy said.

Examples: the Second Cup outlet at the corner of Guilbault St. used to be a delicatessen and soda fountain, as shown in a black-and-white photo.

A frag at the Pharmaprix by Napoléon St. reminds locals it

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Artist Annie Roy

was once inhabited by beloved discount grocer Warshaw.

J. Schreter, a clothing retailer near Marie-Anne St., has a frag with a picture of the owner's parents' wedding.

"Back then, people here got married in restaurants," Joey

Schreter said. "It's part of our history."

The Société also invites people to take the FRAG quiz and answer a questionnaire with lessons from each of the 22 frags between Sherbrooke St. and Mount Royal Ave. People who complete the quizzes are eligible for a prize.

FRAG debuted yesterday, and some posters, like the one at Schreter's, were quickly stolen. Lefebvre said she'll replace them with stronger materials.

The frags are to remain on display permanently, and Roy hopes to add more in years to come.

The project's strength is its absence of commercial value, Roy said. "It's nice to be solicited for something other than for buying stuff."

Trivia answer: In 1825, when the thoroughfare was Montreal's "main" street, it became known as "The Main."

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