

A black and white photograph of a woman in early 20th-century attire, possibly a surveyor or architect, using a surveying instrument on a tripod outdoors. She is looking through the eyepiece of the instrument. The background shows a brick building and some foliage.

PRESERVE TO TRANSFORM
Blanche Lemco van Ginkels vision of an integrative modernity

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Abstract

This thesis explores the legacy of Blanche Lemco van Ginkel (1923–2022), an influential architect and urban planner whose work symbolizes an underappreciated bridge between the modernist urbanism ideologies and the principles of historic preservation. Through a close reading of selected writings, projects, and teachings, this research argues that Lemco van Ginkel redefined preservation as a forward-looking modernist design strategy.

In contrast to early CIAM ideologies that often saw historic fabric as obsolete, Lemco embraced the core principles of modernism, clarity, functionality, rational planning, while also advocating for the inclusion of existing structures. Her position evolved through her involvement with CIAM's later years and Team 10, where she increasingly aligned with more human-centered, socially responsive forms of urbanism. She saw preservation as a means to sustain the urban materials, textures, and human relationships that shape collective memory and civic identity.

Chapter I establishes that Lemco van Ginkel reframed modernism as a tool that could work “from within” the existing city. In Chapter II, the thesis explores her concept of urban memory, showing how she viewed preservation as a way to maintain the lived, multi-layered character of cities. Drawing from her teaching and participatory planning work, Lemco emphasized empirical observation, interdisciplinary learning, and social equity in her planning ethos. Chapter III details how Lemco van Ginkel built a compelling economic case for preservation. She presented that reusing old buildings made financial and ecological sense, aligning with principles of the circular economy. Preservation, she contended, was a pragmatic response to environmental limits, urban quality of life, and economic resilience. Chapter IV offers the rehabilitation of Old Montreal as a case study, where these principles were put into practice. Facing the threat of a highway that would have severed the historic district from its waterfront, the van Ginkels developed an alternative plan that prioritized urban texture, adaptive reuse, and long-term viability. Their proposal, grounded in comprehensive analysis, ultimately helped secure Old Montreal's designation as a historic district.

It concludes by positioning Blanche Lemco van Ginkel as a transformative figure in architectural history. Her work offers methods of how urbanism can integrate modernity and memory, design and duration. Her legacy resonates strongly in contemporary efforts toward sustainable, inclusive, and heritage-conscious planning. This research proposes that studying her work can inform a more integrated approach to urban preservation today, one that preserves not only buildings, but the possibility of meaningful, resilient urban life.

Thesis Outline

0	Introduction. Between Destruction and Memory	
A	Proposal	4
B	Thesis question and Hypothesis	5
I	Preservation as a modernist method Not Against, But Within: Lemco's Post-CIAM Position	6
II	Preservation as protector of urban memory Historical awareness, humanist approach	15
III	Preservation based on economic logic	16
IV	Montreal: A case study	18
V.	Conclusion: Learning from Lemco	27

0 Introduction

0_A Proposal

Blanche Lemco van Ginkel has been an inspiring¹ and pioneering² figure in the mid-20th-century context of modernist urban planning. Her approach to interact with the existing built environment however, seems underexplored³ and underappreciated⁴ in the architectural discourse. With today's challenges of climate crisis or speculative developments, her approach offers relevant insights. She can rightly be seen as a forerunner of modern historic preservation theory, who deserves wider recognition, as her work reflects how architecture can achieve lasting impact through simple means, a deep sensitivity to human experience, and a delicate ability to perceive the city as an interconnected whole.

Her work has already been featured in architectural journals such as *The Canadian Architect* and in exhibitions⁵. Few dissertations and theses have been written about aspects of her life like her professional partnership with her husband, her humanist approach of planning or the aspect of mobility in her work.⁶ The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) archived the most extensive collection of her work, which however can only be consulted by visiting in person.⁷ Comprehensive scholarly engagement with Lemco van Ginkel's⁸ influence on preservation theory however remains scarce.

Preservation, in this context, must be understood as a broader discipline than monument conservation. While monument preservation focuses on the integrity and authenticity of individual heritage structures, historic preservation considers wider contexts, urban fabrics, districts, and landscapes. It involves a balance between safeguarding material legacies and adapting them for new use. Rooted in 19th-century European legislation such as Britain's Ancient Monuments Act (1882) and formalized through key international charters like the *Venice Charter* (1964)⁹ and UNESCO's *World Heritage Convention* (1972), preservation developed as a response to the destruction wrought by industrialization and the destructions of World War II. Although Canada established the Historic Sites and Monuments Board in 1919, its recommendations were non-binding for decades¹⁰. Lemco progressively advocated for contextual preservation before it was codified in law¹¹.

Lemco's education and career positioned her at the core of modernist discourse. After studying architecture at McGill University (graduating in 1945) and earning a Master of Urbanism from Harvard in 1950, she went on to shape key projects across Canada and

¹ McGill University news. Conference announcement: For Her Record: Notes on the Work of Blanche Lemco van Ginkel

² Pagliacolo, E. (2022). *An Ode to Blanche Lemco van Ginkel*. Azure Magazine, Oct 28, 2022

³ Crossman, K. (2008). *Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Sandy Van Ginkel, Blanche Lemco and The Internationalization Of CIAM*. Proceedings, VIIIth International Conference Import-Export: Postwar Modernism in a Expanding World, 1945-1975. p.13

⁴ Pagliacolo, E. (2022). *An Ode to Blanche Lemco van Ginkel*. Azure Magazine, Oct 28,

⁵ like "The 52: Stories of Women Who Transformed Toronto"

⁷ Therefore, sources for this thesis had to be found on other ways.

⁸ In the following called Lemco

⁹ The Venice Charter can almost be interpreted as a founding document of monument preservation, offering key standards for conservation and restoration of cultural assets

¹⁰ The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, last retrieved 16.05.2025
<https://parks.canada.ca/culture/designation/commission-board>

¹¹ Canada's National Historic Sites Act was passed in 1985 and meant to ensure protection of historic monuments and sites.

internationally. Together with her husband H.P. Daniel (Sandy) van Ginkel, she later founded the Van Ginkel Associates, a multidisciplinary firm uniting architecture, landscape, and transportation planning. As she described, Sandy and her were “living and breathing” their work together,¹² which complicates unambiguous attribution. Besides planning and teaching, Lemco also held numerous institutional roles, including a deanship at the University of Toronto (1977-82), and was a member of professional bodies like the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and the American Institute of Architects.

This thesis investigates her approaches for combining principles of modernity and preservation, which sometimes seem to be in tension. It unfolds through three analytical lenses, each comprising a chapter: first, preservation as a modernist method, situating her within and against the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) tradition; second, preservation as protector of urban memory, addressing her ethical stance; and third, preservation as economic action, exploring her arguments for reuse and maintenance. A focused case study, the Rehabilitation of Old Montreal, interweaves with each chapter, offering empirical support. By analyzing selected writings, lectures and professional projects, aim is to highlight the balance between modernism and historic preservation that is visible in her work. Findings can contribute to underscore her sustaining influence on urbanism and offer valuable insights for contemporary discussions on urban planning and its aims to be sustainable, inclusive, and heritage-sensitive.

0_B Thesis question and Hypothesis

How did Blanche Lemco van Ginkel deal with the inclusion of existing structures in her designs?

This thesis argues that Lemco carefully united modernist principles and the preservation of existing structures in her designs. She was able to approach the existing context very sensitively and created a balance between of the original urban fabric and the newly developed structures, reaching functionality, livability, and historic continuity. This can be presented through her professional projects, mainly the Rehabilitation of Old Montreal, and through writings and lectures by her. Unlike many modernist planners of her time, she saw urban renewal as an adaptive process rather than a tabula-rasa intervention.

¹² Blanche Lemco van Ginkel, as cited in McCabe, D. (2020) Honouring the woman who saved Old Montreal. McGill News

I Preservation as a modernist method

Not Against, But Within

Blanche Lemco van Ginkel originates in the heart of the modernist movement, yet she quickly began to transform it. While she studied at McGill University in the 1940s and later joined Harvard University's planning program, she admired modernist masters. She even worked briefly in Le Corbusier's atelier, whom she admired most of all architects at that time and contributed to the designs of the iconic concrete ventilator stacks and the nursery on the rooftop terrace of the *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille.¹³ In those early years, the members of CIAM viewed historic cities as obstacles to rational planning. Manifestos like the La Sarraz Declaration (1928) and the Athens Charter (1933) advocated functional zoning and portrayed historic centers as often unsanitary, inefficient, and psychologically harmful.¹⁴ CIAM IV's "Constatations" contained statements that historic monuments should only be preserved if they were of clear cultural value, posed no health risks to residents, and could be bypassed by modern traffic. Otherwise, demolition was acceptable. The adaptation of new buildings to historic styles was even condemned as having "evil consequences." Slum clearance near monuments, they argued, would allow for healthier green spaces justifying widespread destruction of old urban fabric. The Charter of Athens-tenets further postulated that most cities would not satisfy the psychological and biological needs of the inhabitants and that machines would introduce disorder and chaos¹⁵, to these "inhumane cities"¹⁶. Consequently, plans often neglected existing structures and communities anticipated the destruction of historic urban fabric. Van Ginkel did not adopt its rejection of history and found no contradiction in the combination of modernist principles and engagement with the existing urban fabric.

Before diving into how she challenged some modernist developments, it is important to understand how deeply embedded she was within that very tradition. Lemco's education and early career placed her at the core of CIAM-era modernism. Her early education at McGill University situated her at the intersection of the Beaux-Arts tradition and emerging modernist ideals under John Bland's leadership.¹⁷ Still, Lemco later remarked that her appreciation for historic architecture truly formed through her engagement with European modernists after 1947¹⁸. She rejected the North American dichotomy of "Either you were a Modernist or a Historicist,"¹⁹ affirming the contrary, that a good modernist was, in fact, one who understood history. Lemco herself often used historic references in lectures and writings when teaching modernist ideologies. In *The Form of the Core* for example, she used depictions of the Piazza della Signora and the Campidoglio in Rome to describe abstraction of urban form. But she also referred to LeCorbusier, who was also know for radical designs like the Plan voisin in Paris or statements like „Decorative art is dead. Modern town planning is born with a new

¹³ Richter, A. (2015). Blanche Lemco van Ginkel, Montreal Modernist. Master's Thesis, McGill University, pp. 132-133

¹⁴ Conrads, Ulrich, translated by Bullock, Michael, *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975

¹⁵ Idem., p.137

¹⁶ Idem., p.138

¹⁷ Hodges, 24

¹⁸ As cited in Hodges, M. E. (2004). Blanche Lemco van Ginkel and H.P. Daniel van Ginkel: Urban Planning [doctoral dissertation, McGill University], p.41

¹⁹ Idem., p. 41

architecture. An immense, devastating, brutal evolution has burned the bridges that link us with the past.”²⁰. She still explained “many of us learned a great deal from [him].”²¹

Lemco saw that “CIAM architects were well-versed in architecture across time and respected it. (They also lived with it). The consideration was whether it was good/beautiful architecture in its context. Look at Le Corbusier's sketch books in which he draws historic landmarks and the indigenous, thoughtfully/evocatively and draws upon them for inspiration. [Cornelis] van Eesteren, for some time was president of CIAM, was Chief Architect Planner of Amsterdam and maintained the integrity of the oldest and less old sectors...Also consider the interventions of the Italian Modernists in ancient buildings”²². Her statement aligned with the programmatic thesis of Carl Stein, an advocate of the work of Docomomo²³. He wrote “A [] misapprehension is that historic preservation stands in opposition to [] Modernism [], a position resulting not only from the misunderstanding [] of the word [] “Modern” [] but also from a misreading of the prevailing attitude of the Moderns toward the appropriate use of history and its meaning in the architectural continuum.”²⁴

Lemco’s position evolved through her involvement with CIAM’s later years and Team 10’s founding. Lemco contributed to discussions and presented analytical projects like Levittown or the Far North-East-Sector of Philadelphia with the Group for Architectural Investigation (GAI), a CIAM working group which she co-founded, and used analytical methods like the LeCorbusian grid. Thereby, she participated in CIAM VI in Bridgwater (1947), CIAM IX in Aix-en-Provence (1953), and CIAM X in Otterlo (1959), which marked the final breaking apart of CIAM. At that time, younger members of the group like Alison and Peter Smithson, Aldo van Eyck, and Jacob Bakema (which later contributed to the foundation of Team 10) openly challenged dogmas of the CIAM and advocated for a more human-centered urbanism, criticizing the impersonal, top-down schemes of the 1940s. Lemco inhaled these ideas and echoed Team 10 in such way as that modern architecture should adapt to local context, social patterns, and historic continuity.

When Blanche and Sandy presented their landscape-sensitive redesign for Bowring Park in Newfoundland at CIAM X, the Dutch modernist J. B. Bakema complained “*I find it difficult. You are treating this landscape too kindly.*”²⁵ His critical remark highlighted the distinct approach of the van Ginkels. The couple tried to preserve as much as possible of the natural landscape of the original 1914 romantic design and intended that growth, change and renewal should deliberately contribute to the magic of the park.²⁶ As the park also got enlarged to compensate overintense use, the van Ginkels also managed to include new modern designs, such as Lemco’s footbridge, which was later declared the first modernist heritage site in New Finland and Labrador.²⁷

²⁰ Conrads, Ulrich, *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), p. 90,91 in 1925 "Guiding Principles of Town Planning"

²¹ Van Ginkel, B. L. The urban image. Guest Lecture, Ball State University’s College of Architecture and Planning. Muncie, Indiana, United States, 19.04.1982, min 15

²² As cited in Hodges, M. E. (2004). Blanche Lemko van Ginkel and H.P. Daniel van Ginkel: Urban Planning [doctoral dissertation, McGill University], p.41

²³ Docomomo Journal 44, 2011/1, DOCOMOMO is the international working party for documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern movement. Blanche was in favor of this organization.

²⁴ Idem., p.9

²⁵ Newman, O. (1961). *CIAM '59 in Otterlo*. Hilversum: Van Saane. p. 106

²⁶ Idem. 104

²⁷ For her record- Notes on the Work of Blanche Lemko van Ginkel, conference speaker Sarah Reid 1h 10 min

Another example of Lemco's conviction that historic integration is an extension of modernist principles is her article "*The Form of the Core*" from 1961. She wrote "Our dilemma is that emotionally we like the old European city, but we also want the advantages of contemporary technology"²⁸ and concluded that the essential needs of urban dwellers remained identical over time. It implied that modern planning could and should learn from historic cities how to foster vibrant, livable cores. Additionally, she shared her observation that "*Downtown used to be more interesting than it is now*"²⁹ because of the former diversity of uses and the fine-grained scale that modern centres were lacking. Other differences were walkability, the integration of mixed uses, and spatial enclosure that created a sense of place in the historic core. Lemco urged planners to extract enduring lessons from the past. "*To imitate the past is ridiculous,*" she wrote, "*although a lesson may be learned by examining certain basic factors in historic examples – those factors which have enduring validity because they are derived from man and his natural faculties.*"³⁰ History was framed by her as a *research laboratory* for modern design, not a catalogue to copy styles from. This mindset exemplifies "preservation from within" modernism.

Lemco's approach resonated with methods like functional programming or the inclusion of new technology, but on the other hand diverged from generalist urban renewal plans which is further documented in her engagement in the 1960's. North America's urban development was determined by the urban-renewal-movement, which meant massive demolition of existing fabric for the construction of highways and other structures under the slogan of progress. Lemco defended the old urban fabric and rethought preservation as a means of progress. By opposing Montreal's proposed riverfront expressway (which will be analyzed later), she revealed a widespread misconception in viewing drastic urban renewal as a merely positive influence. What fueled her stance was that this did not reflect nostalgia, but a qualified modernist mindset that insists on a more intelligent form of progress. Lemco and her husband argued that modernization could be reached *within* the existing urban fabrics, by upgrading infrastructure, repurposing buildings, and inserting new structures reasonably, instead of demolition.

Lemco's modernist references supported this integrative approach and made it credible and conclusive. She advocated for modern design and co-designed Montreal's master plan in the early 1960s and later contributed to Expo 67, a quintessential project of Modernity. But even in those projects, she was led by context. In the Expo 67, her concept, titled "Man and the City", envisioned to embed the fair into the city's existing urban context, specifically within the Pointe-Saint-Charles area. Moreover, Old Montreal should be made part of the exposition experience, envisioning the historic quarter as a continuing environment together with the new expo site. The van Ginkels argued that this would have brought lasting value to the land and that environmental and economic costs of creating new land would have been avoided. However, the proposal was ultimately rejected in favor of a more spectacular, large-scale development. Instead artificial islands were built in the St. Lawrence River, reflecting the era's preference for monumental, image-driven planning over an integrative alternative. Yet, her concept embodies her refusal to make a division between the past and the present.

In sum, Lemco redefined preservation as a modernist method. Her projects and articles demonstrated that she was both a committed modernist as well as a protector of the historic stock. Eric Arthur, one of her former professors said "*A good modernist is one who*

²⁸ Van Ginkel, B.L. (1961). The form of the core. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 27(1), p. 56

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Idem.

understands history".³¹ Lemco internalized this. To her, modern cities were layered assemblies of interventions which should respect the "conversations" already on the way. She revealed that efficient and functional architecture and urbanism could be *achieved better* by the integration of inherited urban patterns instead of a work against them. Consequently, she applied and interpreted preservation as a proactive design strategy and as a means to reach for the modernist's goal to improve the city.

While Lemco's reinterpretation of modernist principles influenced her design logic, her understanding of cities as lived spaces, rich in memory and texture, gave preservation deeper purpose. This becomes evident in her treatment of urban memory.

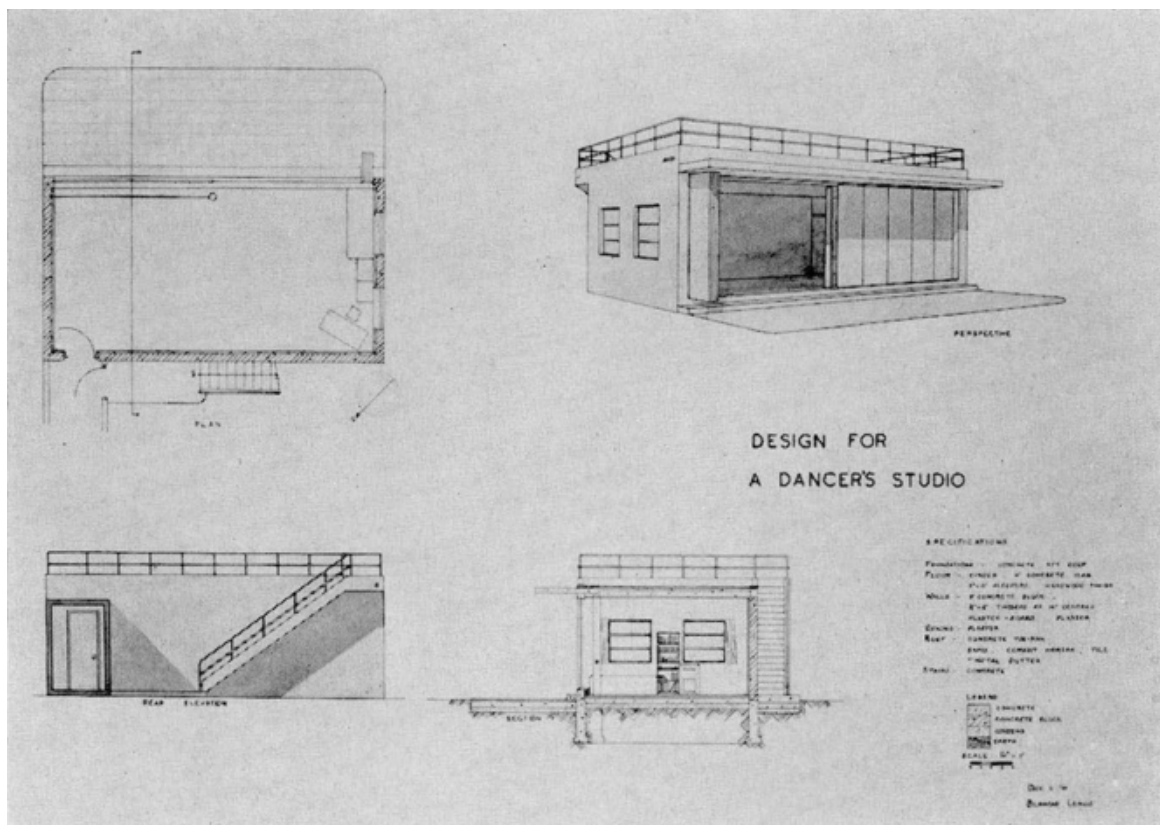


Fig.: 2
A Dancer's Studio. Blanche Lemco's design as part of the second year at McGill University

³¹ Oral Histories Project of the University of Toronto, Interview of Blanche Lemco van Ginkely by Valerie Schatzker , min 20



Fig. 3
Blanche Lemco van Ginkel's contributions: Ventilator shafts and nursery walls on the rooftop garden of the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille

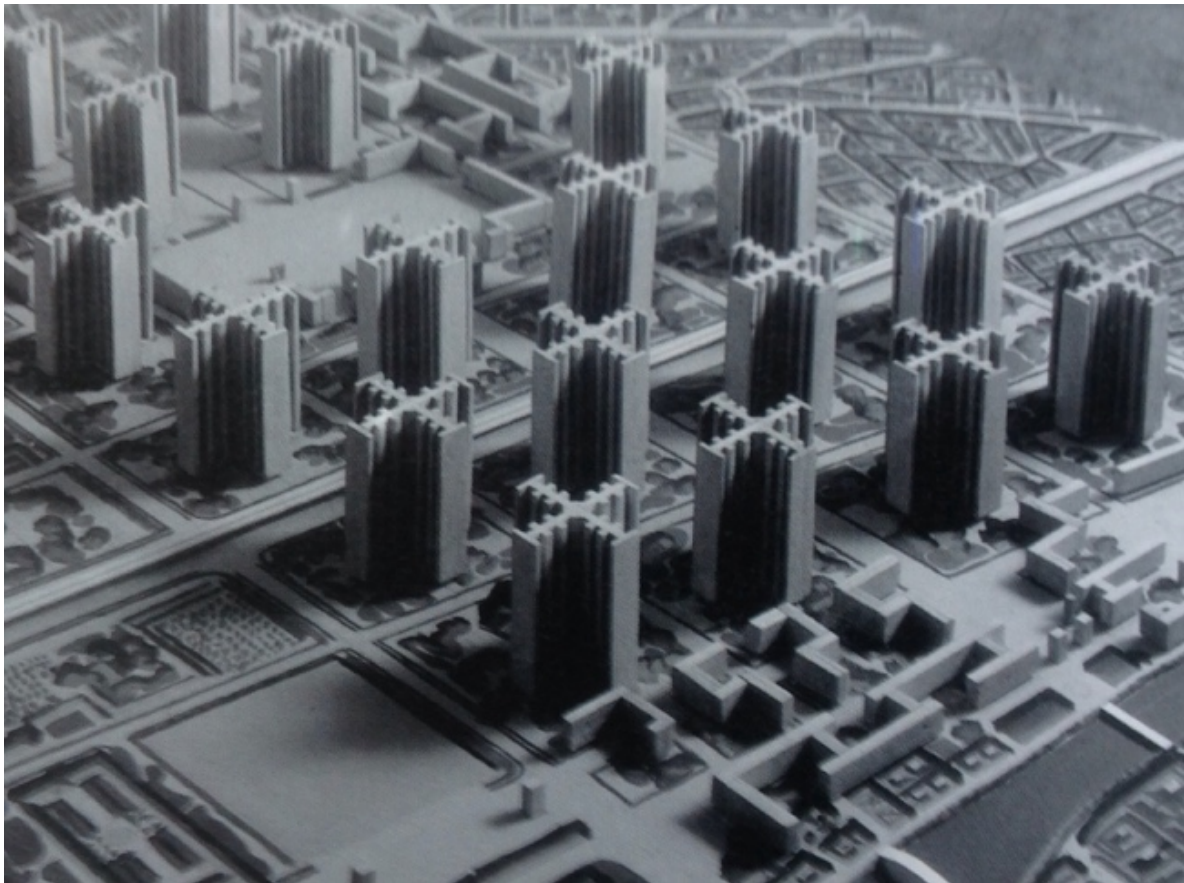


Fig. 4
Paris, Plan Voisin redevelopment design by LeCorbusier



Fig. 5
In the CIAM of Otterlo in 1959: the Smithsons, Voeckler and Bakema holding a banner announcing the death of the CIAM, while Aldo van Eyck and Blanche Lemco peek below

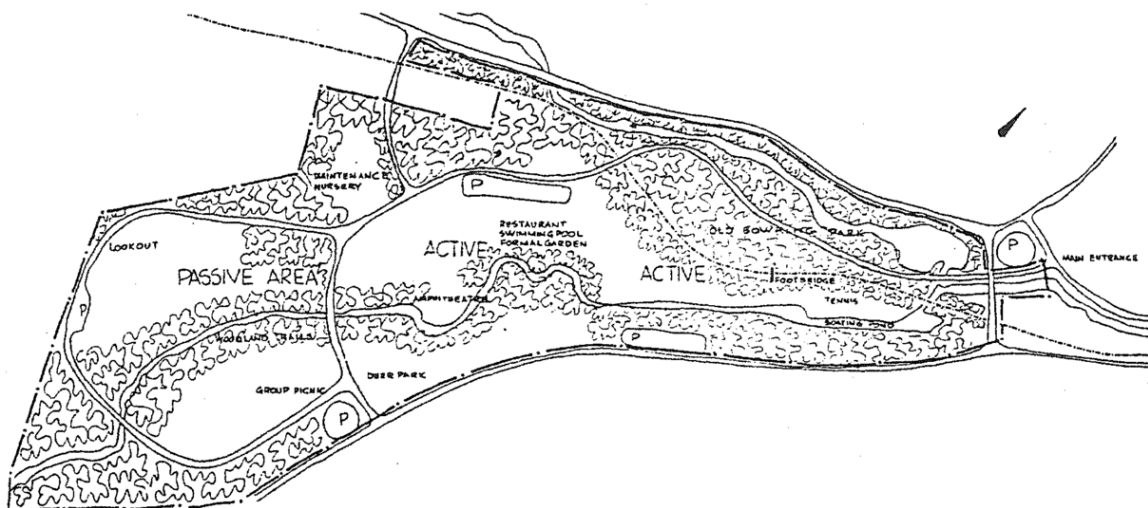


Fig. 6
Functional zoning, Active and passive zones of Bowring park

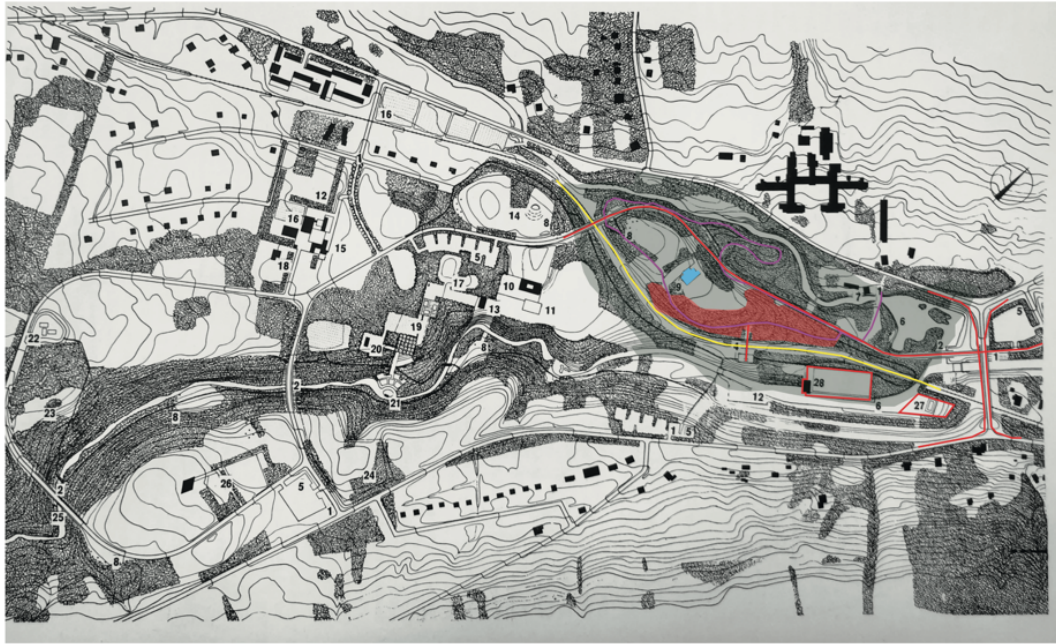


Fig. 7 (above),8 Comparison of the integration of the old Park features.

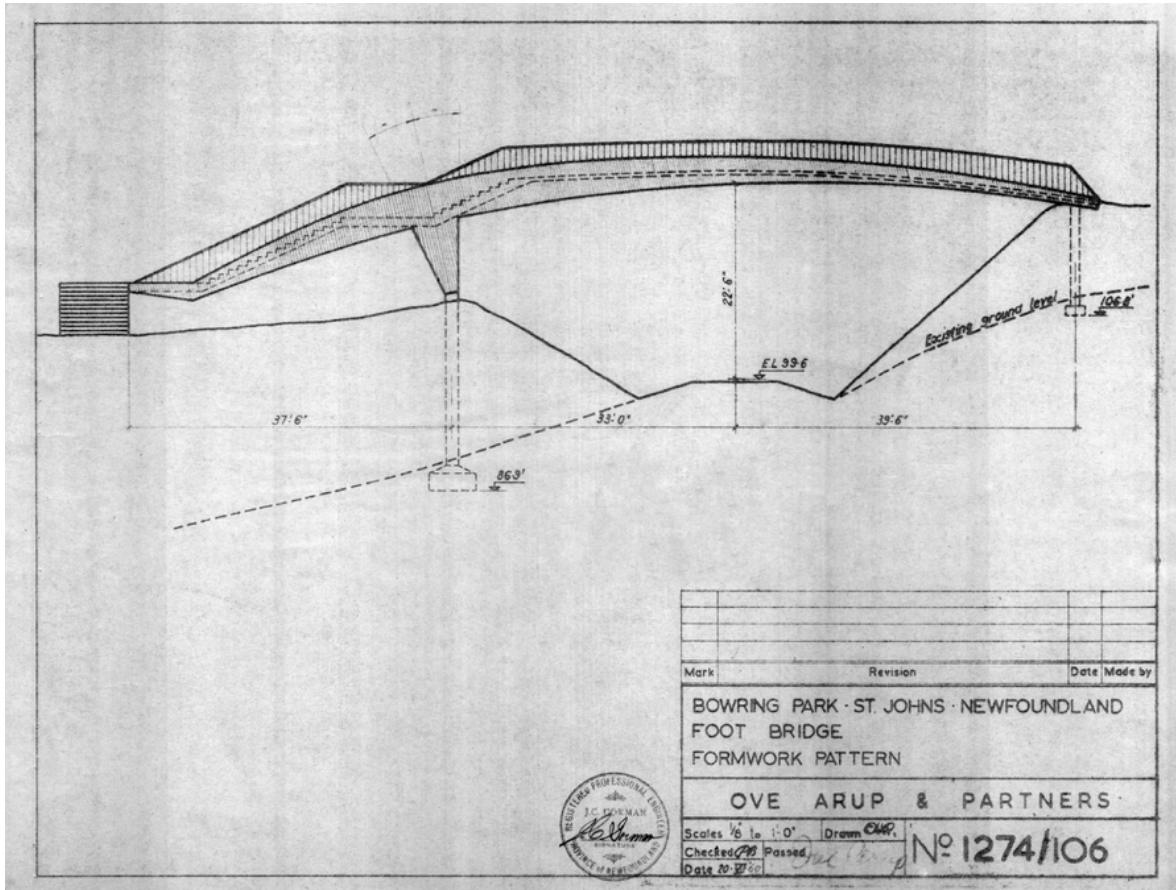


Fig: 9
Blanche Lemco's design for a footbridge in Bowring Park



Fig: 10
Van Ginkel Associates: presentation model of Montreal. Old Montreal and the Expo 67



Fig: 11
Comparative postcard of the final draft of the new Expo-Islands

II Preservation as protector of urban memory

In Blanche Lemco van Ginkel's work, preservation also serves as a means to sustain the lived identity and the urban memory of a space, which accumulates textures, patterns, and all kinds of uses essential to a city's cultural vitality. This chapter explores how Lemco used planning, pedagogy, and policy to protect urban memory, especially through her educational work and urban analysis, and how this view shaped the logic later articulated in her economic arguments.

Her professional writing frequently returned to the concept of the "urban image" as a multi-layered system of meaning. In her lecture with the same title, she distinguished between symbolic, environmental, and everyday images, from landmarks and geography to ordinary streetscapes.³² For Lemco, preserving a city meant protecting all these interrelated dimensions. In Montreal, for instance, the city's identity was found not just in major icons, but in the cobblestones, courtyards, and rhythms of Old Montreal's facades.

This nuanced view of preservation was embedded in her teaching, especially during her deanship at the University of Toronto (1977–1982). There, she shaped a curriculum that brought together architects, landscape architects, sociologists, and historians to address architecture as a cultural and civic practice. She urged her students to read the logic of place, its massing, geography, and lived uses, before proposing interventions. Her 1998 article "Culture and Architecture" captured this ethos, arguing that architecture must respond to both tangible and intangible dimensions of human life.

Lemco's methodology was neither purely formal nor abstract. She combined archival research, direct observation, and social engagement. In the South Indian Lake project in Manitoba, she worked with Indigenous communities to integrate local knowledge into planning. She advocated for non-specialized language and visual tools to include non-professional voices, defending cultural memory in elite heritage districts and in marginalized communities.

Lemco's critique of postwar urban renewal in North America was especially sharp. She warned against exaggerated historicism and the erasure of the urban rhythm in the name of progress. In a 1982 lecture, she stated: "The city should make very explicit references to the past [...] Imitation may be the highest form of flattery, but flattery seldom serves us well."³³ Instead of copying forms, she called for understanding the logic behind them. In Old Montreal, she sought not only to preserve buildings but to maintain the human scale and street life that defined its urban everyday spatial practices. When later reflecting on the district's over-commercialization, she lamented that it had lost its "normal city life." This demonstrated that her ultimate concern was not the picturesque but the continuity of authentic urban life.

Her distinction between preservation and "forced historicism" marked a critical departure from prevailing trends. She believed that new interventions should support the composition and cultural rhythm of a place. For instance, in Montreal's rehabilitation, she allowed for the inclusion of newer buildings if they contributed to the overall character of the streetscape. Preservation, to her, was not a rigid act of freezing time, but a flexible strategy to maintain meaning.

³² Van Ginkel, B. L. The urban image. Guest Lecture, Ball State University's College of Architecture and Planning. Muncie, Indiana, United States, 19.04.1982

³³ Idem., min 16-19

These ideas were not merely theoretical. Her collaborations with civic groups, architects, and officials in Montreal resulted in detailed reports that proposed adaptive reuse and context-sensitive design. Her documentation of facades, assessments of usage patterns, and photographic surveys showed how urban memory could be preserved through empirical research. Her goal was to ensure that the stories, uses, and rhythms of a district remained legible even as the city evolved.

Lemco van Ginkel's approach resonated with the post-CIAM critique offered by Team 10. The 1954 Doorn Manifesto emphasized that architecture should grow from the culture and climate of its people. Her humanist approach reflected these values. She championed the participatory processes that later became hallmarks of inclusive urban design. McGill PhD student Cigdem Talu noted that Lemco combined architectural skill with "real care and confrontational analysis," consistently applying an ethical commitment to the city across her career.³⁴

Before she could argue that preservation made fiscal sense, she had to show that it preserved something valuable. Her pragmatic but sensitive stance allowed her to influence both cultural attitudes and planning policies. If preservation helped cities retain their identity, it also helped them remain economically viable. The next chapter explores how she fused heritage and pragmatism.

III Preservation based on economic logic

In an era dominated by economic metrics and growth imperatives, the preservation of historic structures was often dismissed as inefficient or sentimental. Blanche Lemco van Ginkel directly challenged this view, arguing that economic reasoning could support, not contradict, preservation. Her work reframed old buildings not as liabilities, but as adaptable assets capable of sustaining value over time, functionally, socially, and financially.

In her 1970 article "Depreciation and Redevelopment," van Ginkel articulated a pragmatic and forward-thinking case for conservation. She emphasized that buildings, if well-maintained, could enjoy long and useful lives. Drawing from examples in Europe where houses three centuries old remained desirable due to continuous repair, she argued that the essence of a building's value lay not in its original materials, but in its enduring function. "It is possible that nothing now remains of the original building materials except the masonry," she wrote, but the function and vitality of the structure could persist.³⁵ This insight redefined what it meant for a building to be "alive," emphasizing that replacing windows, joists, or plumbing over time did not negate its relevance or usefulness.

She further argued that demolition and reconstruction are both environmentally costly and economically shortsighted when existing structures retain intrinsic value. This reasoning aligns with today's circular economy principles: preserving embodied energy and extending lifecycles. For Lemco, preservation was not antithetical to development, redevelopment its instrumental for preservation. In this sense, cities could evolve through preservation by reinvesting in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure. Projects like Old Montreal demonstrated this approach: restoring facades, pedestrianizing streets, and converting historic warehouses to apartments offered economic gains without sacrificing identity.

³⁴ For her record- Notes on the Work of Blanche Lemco van Ginkel, conference speaker Cigdem Talu 1h 35 min

³⁵ Van Ginkel, B. L. (1970). Depreciation and Redevelopment. *Canadian Architect*, 15(3). p.60

Her plan for Old Montreal embodied this dual logic. Traffic calming and adaptive reuse zones were proposed to boost commerce while reinforcing cultural character. Enhancing the historic atmosphere through functional interventions, like pedestrian priority streets, offered both economic returns and cultural depth. Lemco's strategy persuaded policymakers not by romanticizing history, but by showing quantifiable benefits. Rehabilitating older areas meant supporting local businesses, increasing property values, and creating walkable, livable districts.

Though she recognized the challenges of modern urban economies, van Ginkel believed in mediation, not retreat. "Technological and economic conditions today militate against the character of the old city," she wrote, acknowledging pressures toward large-scale, mechanized developments. Yet she insisted on alternative strategies to adapt and preserve. Her economic logic extended beyond balance sheets to include cultural capital, environmental sustainability, and long-term urban resilience.

Van Ginkel also emphasized the social dimension of economic value. She argued that historic environments contributed to quality of life, community identity, and attractiveness to investment and talent. Vibrant, culturally resonant districts outperformed generic developments because they offered authenticity and diversity. In Montreal, retaining the Vieux-Port district ensured that the city preserved a rare North American asset many others had lost. Lemco critiqued the monotony of modern downtowns and promoted a return to human scale, mixed uses, and spatial variety.

Her vision also broadened the definition of urban "value." Value wasn't merely profitability or speed of movement, but also longevity, sustainability, tourism potential, and the prevention of alienation. Properly maintained historic districts, she argued, could be "working part(s) of the contemporary city," contributing to everyday life and economic vitality. Old Montreal's eventual success, with its galleries, shops, and civic life, proved her point.

This pragmatic sensibility extended into environmental advocacy. In their "Brief to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972," the Van Ginkel Associates called for "optimum use" of matter and energy "without waste." This was not a moral appeal, but a planning strategy rooted in minimizing resource depletion. In the Midtown Manhattan Transportation Plan, Blanche and Sandy van Ginkel proposed traffic reduction strategies and even conceptualized the "Ginkelvan," an early hybrid-electric shuttle designed to reduce pollution while enhancing accessibility. These ideas anticipated today's green urbanism.

Van Ginkel consistently argued that the most sustainable building is the one that already exists. This conviction supported both ecological stewardship and economic pragmatism. Walkable, accessible environments, she showed, could stimulate both local commerce and social cohesion. Her work emphasized that economic logic, far from justifying erasure, could reinforce preservation as the wiser choice.

Her understanding of the "urban image" also reveals the depth of her perspective. For van Ginkel, the city's identity emerged not only from iconic monuments but from its grain, terrain, and everyday spatial relationships. "There is the quintessential public and symbolic image," she wrote, "but also the image of the city which derives from its geography... from the mass and the density of buildings and the character of the spaces between." This sense of urban texture is what she sought to protect and extend through preservation-based planning. But in addition to the non-living components, Lemco was also deeply caring about the human

action and movement in space that contributed to the image, which she explained in her article “Aesthetic considerations in Community planning.”

Her environmental ethic was further expressed in the couple’s campaign to protect Mount Royal Park. They resisted overdevelopment, called for expanded protective boundaries, and articulated a vision rooted in "Victorian" values of grace and pride. Their efforts helped shape policy that culminated, decades later, in a height restriction to preserve the mountain’s symbolic presence over Montreal. It was another case where cultural memory and ecological awareness merged into a strategic and enduring urban gesture.

Ultimately, her economic logic strengthened the thesis that preservation, far from opposing modernism, was a key method for realizing its social and environmental goals. But theories need to be tested. In the rehabilitation of Old Montreal, cultural sensitivity, economic logic, and modernist design principles converged. The following case study puts her approach into action.

IV Montreal: A case study

The rehabilitation of Old Montreal serves as a manifestation of Blanche Lemco van Ginkel’s integrative approach to modernism and historic preservation. The project internalizes ideas of the three previous chapters. Old Montreal became both a site of contested planning visions as well as a proving ground for a new kind of design thinking: one that could be both modern and memory-driven.

The historic waterfront district of Montreal, was at risk by the late 1950’s. The proposal of a large-scale East–West expressway would accept to cut across the city’s shore and sever Old Montreal from the rest of the urban fabric. The scheme resembled other destructive infrastructure projects such as Boston’s Central Artery or Toronto’s Gardiner Expressway, prioritizing car access and traffic speed at the cost of community, continuity, and history. The van Ginkels uncovered that the access ramps proposed as part of the elevated eight-lane highway (intentionally neglected in the drawings by the designers), would have had devastating impact on historic sites like Bonsecours Market and Place Royale, threatened to sever the old city from its harbor and destroy significant portions of its French colonial urban fabric. They did not reject modernization or the need for a new highway per se, but challenged its blind disproportionate and destructive implementation. They opposed the expressway not out of romanticism but from a modernist and humanist logic, desiring long-term utility.

Moreover, the partners identified contemporary pressures undermining the district’s function: the expansion of industrial enterprises, changes in transportation, shifts in the port economy, and a weakening social identity as a commercial center. Their solution was holistic: restore the area's social and economic life by preserving its fabric, texture, and human scale. Restoration, they argued, could not succeed without also reviving activity.

They provided not just criticism but a viable alternative. Their sustainable proposal re-routed traffic through tunnels and discarded rail corridors, preserving the original urban texture above the ground. Their planning documents reflected a detailed and methodical analysis. They overlaid historic maps to trace urban development and identify the oldest remaining buildings. They examined property use, circulation patterns, parking, building conditions, and architectural merit, combining visual inspection with photographic documentation. They enlisted the Montreal Society of Architects to help evaluate significance. Rather than focusing

solely on individual landmarks, they emphasized the collective aesthetic and spatial quality of the historic streetscape. This empirical approach reflected Lemco's belief in a form of preservation that was data-driven, interpretative, and grounded in architectural intelligence.³⁶ Their report also introduced a key feature. To them, the preservation of "aesthetic of the old streets" outweighed the retention of individual buildings. In other words, value lied in the collective character of the urban fabric, in this case, buildings of different times could still form a "recognizable entity", as Lemco called it.³⁷ The couple demonstrated commitment to preserving not isolated monuments but lived environments.

Economically, the Van Ginkels framed the expressway as a long-term liability and argued that that its construction would depress property values, displace small businesses, and disrupt the area's still-functioning commercial ecosystem. They held against this the proposal to preserve the historic district, which would instead maintain a working district and capitalize on its unique identity to attract tourism, investment, and cultural engagement. Lemco presented the heritage as an adaptable framework within which contemporary life could continuously thrive.

The design proposals went further. The van Ginkels suggested traffic calming, a reintroduction of the original pedestrian zones, and adaptive reuse strategies. By showing that modern infrastructure could coexist with historic form, Lemco managed to redefine the purpose of redevelopment. Crucially, the project was a proactive planning exercise. Couple worked with civic groups and municipal authorities, giving policymakers a dignified alternative to retreat from the Lalonde&Valois plan. Their ultimately succeeded. In 1964, Old Montreal was designated as a historic district, and the expressway was rerouted. Today, the district thrives as both economic asset and cultural icon a vindication of their approach.

The success of Old Montreal validates the central claim of this thesis: that modernist planning and historic preservation are mutually enriching when guided by care, analysis, and imagination. Her work in Montreal was a turning point for the city and for the discipline of urbanism. It showcased an urbanism that listens, interprets, and adapts; one that understands the past as a foundation for living futures instead of as an obstacle.

³⁶ In "For her Record- notes on the work of Blanche Lemco van Ginkel", one speaker expressed her enthusiasm for the thoroughness with which blanche worked , 1h 20 min

³⁷ Van Ginkel, B. L. (1961). Aesthetic considerations in community planning. *Community planning review*, 11(4). p. 30



Fig. 12
Blanche and Sandy van Ginkel after taking first aerial photos to document Old Montreal to save the city's historic core, 1960

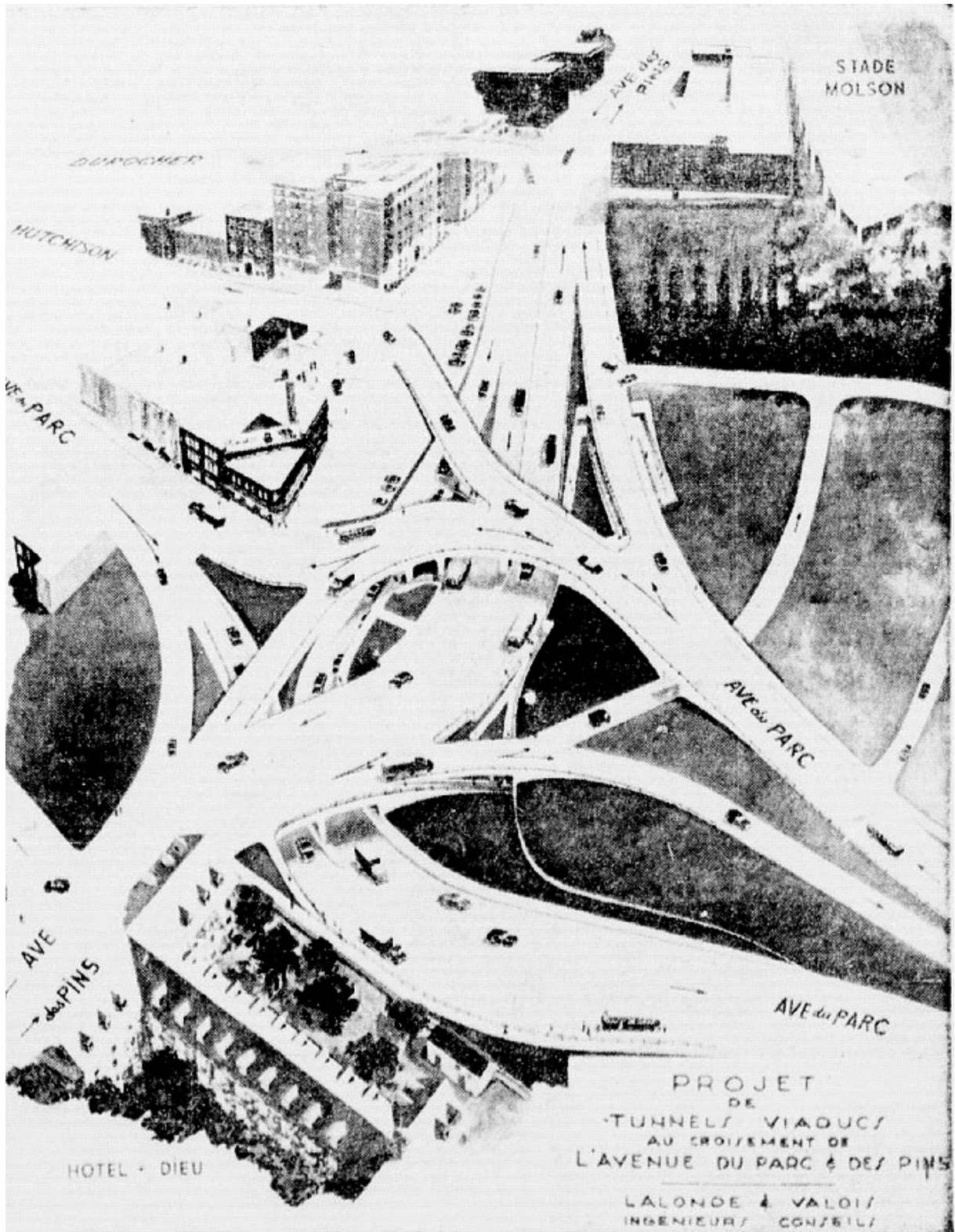


Fig. 13
East-West-Expressway designed by Lalonde and Valois plan 1948



Fig. 14
East-West-Expressway aerial rendering 1948

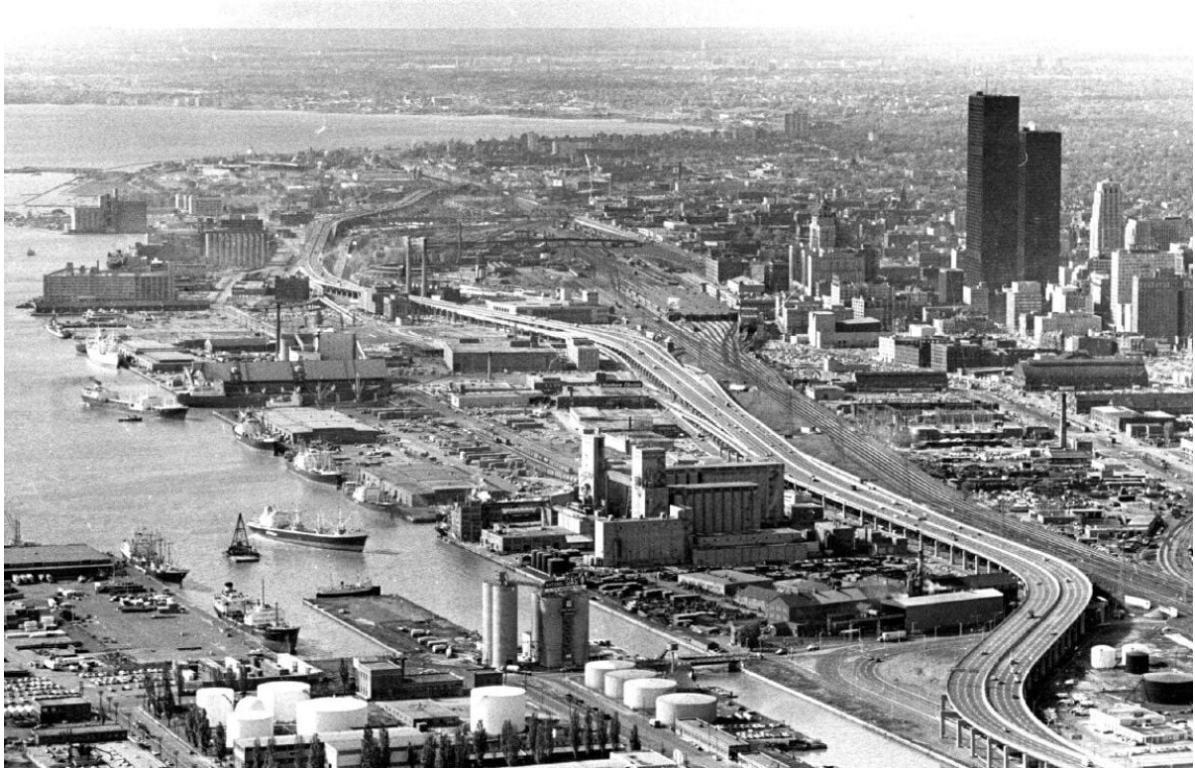


Fig. 15
Gardiner Expressway, Toronto 1969

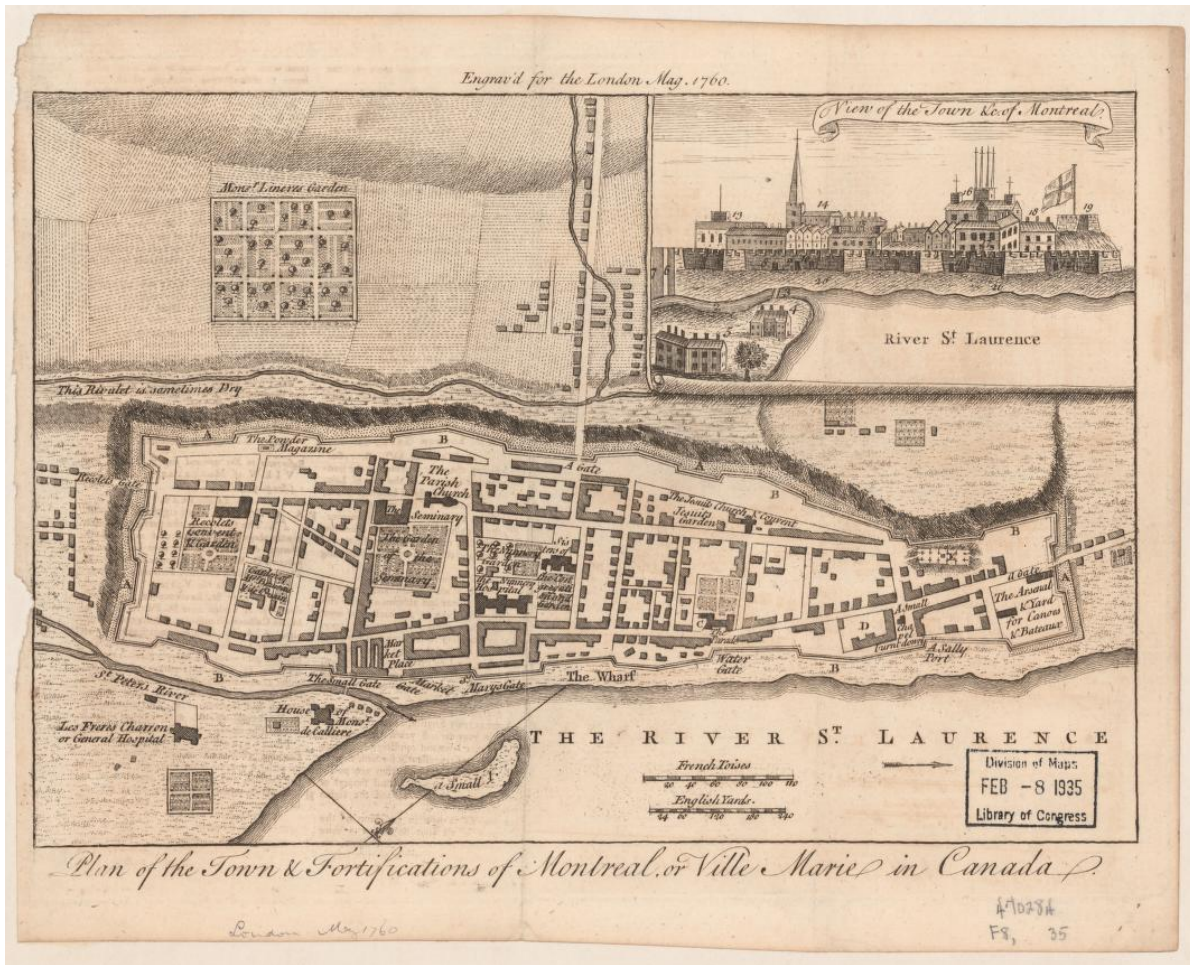


Fig. 16
Montreal 1760



Fig. 17
Montreal 1892



Fig. 18
Photo negatives of Old Montreal's façades (screenshot from a video conference)

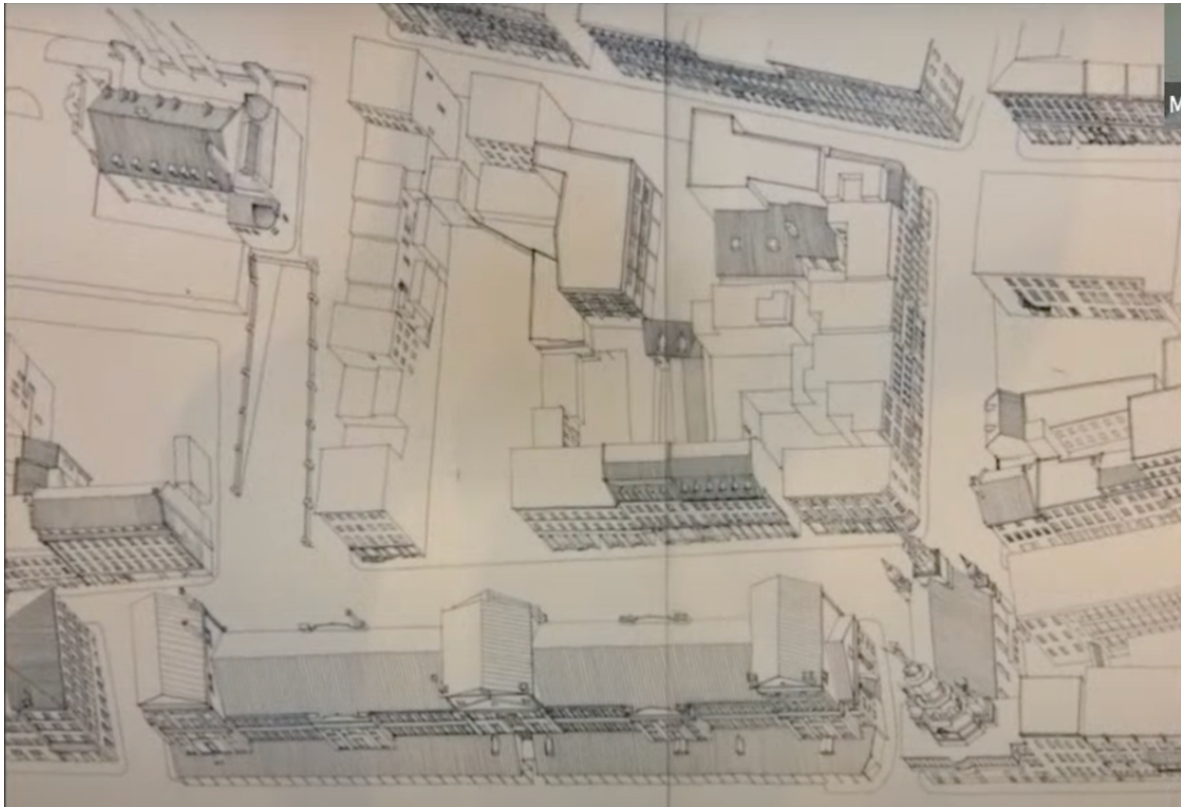


Fig. 19
Lemco van Ginkel's drawings of existing buildings in Old Montreal

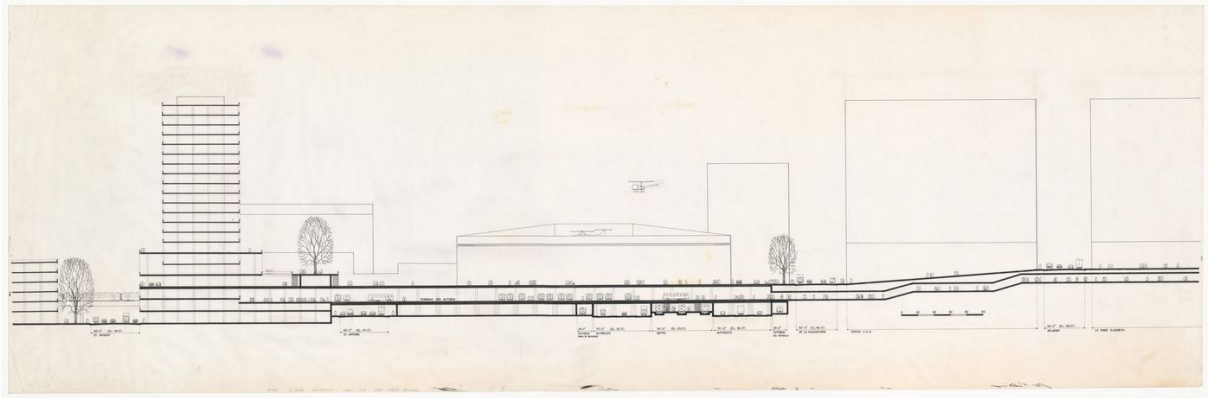


Fig: 20
Underground traffic in Montreal

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, JUNE 29, 1972

Introducing the Ginkelvan, Mini-Bus for Midtown

By FRANK J. PRIAL

The Ginkelvan, a 20-passenger mini-bus (or maxi-taxi) that is no longer than a Cadillac limousine and was designed for crowded city centers, was shown here for the first time yesterday.

The persimmon-colored fiberglass vehicle was designed by Van Ginkel Associates of Montreal, an urban-planning firm. It is the outgrowth of studies done by Van Ginkel for Manhattan's Office of Midtown Planning and Development.

Van Ginkel's study proposed a network of pedestrian streets in the midtown area closed to all traffic except for some form of public transport "that would zip people in style, comfort and elegance the short distances they might not wish to walk."

Next came a search of North America, Europe and Japan to find such a vehicle, or someone willing to build it. The search was unsuccessful. "So we decided to build it ourselves," Mr. Strobach said.

Floor Close to Curb

The Ginkelvan has a floor only six inches from the curb and with a small ramp, can accommodate wheelchairs and baby carriages. Despite its short wheelbase, it has standing room for six-footers.

The prototype is powered by a six-cylinder diesel engine. Front-wheel drive makes possible the very low floor. Van Ginkel executives said yesterday that a pollution-free electric motor, if available, could be fitted to the van easily.

The van's sliding door opens to 41 inches, and the large tinted windows can be opened at the top or completely removed in good weather. The 15 upholstered individual seats are equipped with armrests, and the vehicle is fully carpeted.

The prototype cost Van Ginkel about \$125,000, and a second model, similar to the first, is now under construction. There are no present plans

for mass production. Peter Strobach, a Van Ginkel aide, said, that the vehicle had been shown earlier this month at Transpo 72, the transportation show in Washington, and that the response had been "overwhelming."

Elderly Show Interest

"The interest was particularly strong among people from Florida and Arizona — states with large numbers of elderly people," Mr. Strobach said. "They liked the idea of the low step."

Mr. Strobach said that one man involved in retirement communities wanted to order 600 Ginkelvans.

Jacquelin T. Robertson, director of the Office of Midtown Planning and Development, described the Ginkelvan as "nifty" and said he would like to see several operated experimentally here by the taxi industry.

The New York Times/Patrick A. Burns

Prototype of the Ginkelvan, 20-passenger vehicle by Van Ginkel Associates, on display

Fig: 21 Introduction of the Ginkelvan in the New York Times

V Conclusion: Learning from Lemco

This thesis showed that Blanche Lemco van Ginkel diverged from tendencies of early CIAM modernists. Throughout her career, she challenged the binary between modernism and historic preservation and argued that cities could evolve without erasing their past. Her professional trajectory stands as a counterpoint to the narrative that modernism necessitated rupture and replacement. What distinguishes her contribution is the consistency of her stance: modernist in principle, yet deeply rooted in cultural memory and urban continuity. She demonstrated that a designer could uphold ambitions of modernism while integrating historical layers into the planning of contemporary cities. To Lemco, preservation was a rational and strategic act, an ethical and economical choice as well as a means to sustain identity, civic life, and environmental responsibility.

The research contributes to a new reading of Lemco as a critical, though underrecognized, figure in architectural history. She did neither write manifestos nor produce iconic landmarks, but shaped cities through planning reports, public engagement, interdisciplinary teaching, and policy advocacy. Her legacy lies in the methods, values, and questions she introduced to urban practice. Highlighted importance of small interventions like context-sensitive infill aligned her with the values now central to contemporary urbanism: resilience, sustainability, and inclusivity. The resurgence of walkable urban cores, the revaluation of mixed-use neighborhoods, and the global heritage conservation movement all echo principles she advocated decades earlier. She highlighted the social value of “intangible” heritage in preserving the very possibility of meaningful and lively, humane urban futures. Her practice asks us to reconsider what we keep, why we keep it, and how we design cities that do justice to both memory and imagination. It is a call to study the old fabric closely, to filter out the long-lasting strengths and to design rather reinforcing interventions than replacements.

Future research might further analyze whether Lemco’s work catalyzed stricter preservation policies or other political frameworks for planning in the Canada. Secondly, comparative studies between Old Montreal and other preserved districts like in Amsterdam could yield valuable insights for dialogues on urban memory. Thirdly and lastly, the thesis question could be further elaborated and expanded through answered from sources of the CCA, which were not accessible from Europe.

I would like to end with a quote by the policy director for Heritage Montreal, Dinu Bumbaru, who said “*The Van Ginkels were modernists. They believed in modern architecture. But they didn’t disconnect that from caring about heritage*”³⁸.

³⁸ Honouring the Woman who saved Old Montreal, Daniel McCabe, BA’89, May 2020

List of figures

Fig.1

cover photo: <https://pioneeringwomen.bwaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/1.-entry-42-1.jpg>

Fig. 2

A Dancer's Studio. Blanche Lemco van Ginkel.

Fig. 3

Unité d'habitation's rooftop, designed by Blanche Lemco van Ginkel. Photo by Vincent Desjardins

Fig. 4

Model of the Plan Voisin for Paris by Le Corbusier displayed at the Nouveau Esprit Pavilion (1925)

Last retrieved 16.04.2025

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plan_Voisin#/media/Datei:Plan_Voisin_model.jpg

Fig. 5

In the CIAM of Otterlo in 1959: the Smithsons, Voeckler and Bakema holding a banner announcing the death of the CIAM, while Aldo van Eyck and Blanche Lemco peek below

Last retrieved 16.04.2025 [https://cronologiadourbanismo.ufba.br/image.php/apresentacao-v1560-f886-](https://cronologiadourbanismo.ufba.br/image.php/apresentacao-v1560-f886-original.jpg?width=800&height=800&image=/verbete_arquivo/imagens/apresentacao-v1560-f886-original.jpg)

[original.jpg?width=800&height=800&image=/verbete_arquivo/imagens/apresentacao-v1560-f886-original.jpg](https://cronologiadourbanismo.ufba.br/image.php/apresentacao-v1560-f886-original.jpg?width=800&height=800&image=/verbete_arquivo/imagens/apresentacao-v1560-f886-original.jpg)

Fig. 6

Bowring Park, Active and Passive Areas, 1959, Daniel van Ginkel and Blanche Lemco van Ginkel, Newman, Oscar, 104

Fig. 7

Figure 17. Master Plan for Bowring Park, 1959, Daniel van Ginkel, "Bowring Park," The Canadian Architect vol. 5 no. 7 (July 1960). Colour added by me

Fig. 8

Frederick G. Todd, Design for Bowring Park, St. Johns, Newfoundland, 1913. St. Johns Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador. Colours added by me.

Fig.9

Ginkel Associates and Ove Arup & Partners, formwork drawing for the Foot Bridge in Bowring Park, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, 1959. City of St. John's Archives

Fig. 10

Presentation model of the Canadian World Exposition, "Man in the City", CCA

<https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/search/details/collection/object/412592> last retrieved 16.05.2025

Fig. 11

Montreal - Expo 67

<https://www.postcard-shop.de/montreal-expo-67?a=2121605> last retrieved 16.05.2025

Fig. 12

1960 publicity photo of Blanche and Sandy van Ginkel after a helicopter ride for the first aerial photography documenting Old Montreal to save the historic core of the city.

Fig. 13

https://blogger.googleusercontent.com/img/b/R29vZ2xl/AVvXsEj1HBZyko3GeLEcdMkipL-5FRrWR_avL40OgsPDTqUnkpM1y20B0Clp_y5h_E0XeWY8cYg_yQTwbKrwD6F7don8Cea4kWZKphHdFNny-Lifj0E5VC79LlhZkTFwbfONK0Nd4Qqg/s1600-h/pine-park-plans-59.jpg
no author known, Lalonde et Valois plan

Fig. 14

network of traffic ways. an east-west exPressway, montreal, city of montreal Planning dePartment, 1948. | city of montréal archiVes section

Fig. 15

The Gardiner Expressway looking west on Oct. 21, 1969. Jeff Goode / Toronto Star Archives

Fig. 16

Plan of the town & fortifications of Montreal, or Ville Marie in Canada
Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA dcu
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3454m.ar061501/?r=-0.239,-0.046,1.538,0.844,0> last retrieved 16.04.2025

Fig. 17

Map of the Island of Montreal prepared by J. Rielle in 1892, McGill Library

Fig. 18

own screenshot of the video For her record- Notes on the Work of Blanche Lemco van Ginkel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNIiIX4swio> last retrieved 16.04.2025

Fig. 19

own screenshot of the video For her record- Notes on the Work of Blanche Lemco van Ginkel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNIiIX4swio> last retrieved 16.04.2025

Fig. 20

Site section for Central Area Circulation, Montreal. CCA
<https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/search/details/collection/object/490571> last retrieved 16.04.2025

Fig. 21

Article "Introducing the Ginkelman, Mini-Bus for Midtown" from The New York Times. Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture. Van Ginkel Associates fonds, reference number ARCH283029

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Use of artificial intelligence:

I used artificial intelligence in the beginning of the course to come up with a first outline, because this was helpful to me to have a starting point for the research, however, this outline quickly changed after desk critiques, so nothing of it is left. Additionally, I sometimes asked Chatgpt for image sources or further resources, which unfortunately did not differ from the ones that I had found anyway.