MONTREAL MUSEUM ACQUIRES GOTHIC TREASURE

The most valuable purchase in the 111-year history of The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts — a superb sixteenth-century sculpture by the Late Gothic German master Tilmann Riemenschneider — was announced last month.

Although the cost of the sculpture was not disclosed, 18 months of the Museum's endowment income were committed to the purchase. In addition, part of the cost was donated by the sculpture's former owner, Professor L.V. Randall, of Montreal, an honorary vice-president of the Museum.

St. Sebastian, the lindenwood sculpture by Tilmann Riemenschneider, was created sometime between 1506-1510. It measures 28 3/8 inches in height by 9 1/2 width.

In announcing the acquisition, Museum Director David Giles Carter said that an appeal had been made to the Secretary of State Gérard Pelletier for a grant to match the annual purchase funds of the Museum.

Some of the world's leading museums — the Louvre in Paris, the Metropolitan in New York, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, among them — also own work by Riemenschneider.

"When the possibility of acquiring this figure by Riemenschneider was first broached, hard-headed attention had to be given by the Museum to realize such an ambitious addition to the collection," Mr.

Carter said. "The quality of the object, the unusual nature of the sculpture, itself a model, the absence not only in Montreal but in Canada of any piece of Late Gothic sculpture of comparable quality and the revenues to be estimated from endowment, all composed part of but not the full answers to the challenge.

Though the Museum set a precedent by committing endowment income for 18 months, it is convinced that, with such an addition as this, it has taken an important step towards the enhancement of its collection and the goals of the Museum.

Sir Kenneth Clark, author of the celebrated television series and book *Civilisation,* calls Reimenschneider "one — perhaps the best — of many German carvers in the Late Gothic style".

The work, formerly in public and private collections in Munich, Frankfurt, Chelsea, Berne and Montreal, depicts the Martyrized St. Sebastian. It "markedly emphasizes the fragility of person" and features "a formal perfection and new sense of beauty".

Said Mr. Carter:

"The fleeting smile gives an expression of pathos to Riemenschneider's model which has a haunting beauty and nobility of form separating it from those it inspired and transcending the limitations of the medium with the delicacy of its carving and perfection to surface."

ST. SEBASTIAN

St. Sebastian, a martyr of the early Church, is said to have been born in Narbonne, in Gaul in 255 and to have died in 288 in Rome.

A secret Christian, his legend states, he entered the Roman army in Milan in the hope of aiding persecuted fellow-Christians, and rose to high favour with the Emperor Diocletian.

Upon the discovery of his religion, he was condemned to die and, left for dead by a troop of archers, he was nursed back to health by a Christian woman named Irene. He again appeared before the Emperor, professing his faith, and was ordered beaten to death by clubs in the amphitheatre in Rome. His body was flung into the sewers but was recovered and interred in the catacombs.

St. Sebastian is one of the saints most widely represented in art, especially in Italy and in the German states. Bernini, Mantegna, Perugino, Titian and Giordano are some of the Italian artists who portrayed the saint.

Northern artists, such as Hans Memling in Bruges, depicted the saint lashed to a tree. Italian artists were the first to show Sebastian bound to a column.