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Statue wax

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Life-size statue of Jacques Cartier with wax head and resin hands.

Accession Number 2021.56.01

Period 21st century

Materials fiber, metal, plastic, wax

Historical context

There is no reliable portrait of Jacques Cartier. According to Gustave Lanctot, the only authentic portrait is a 2-inch sketch on the Desceliers map. The image we have of him is therefore inspired by several different representations.

Jacques Cartier was born in Saint-Malo, France, in 1491. He probably took part in several maritime explorations in his youth (Newfoundland and Brazil). In 1534, he was appointed by King François 1er to lead an expedition to North America to "discover certain islands and countries where it is said there should be a large quantity of gold and other rich things". He was also asked to find a route to Asia. He left on April 20, 1534 with two ships and 61 men. He sailed around Newfoundland, the Magdalen Islands, Prince Edward Island and Chaleur Bay. On July 24, 1534, he planted a 30-foot cross in Gaspé, and hung a coat of arms of France on it as a token of possession of the territory. On his second voyage (2 ships, 110 men) in 1535, he explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the mouth of the Saguenay Fjord, Quebec City, as far as Hochelaga (Montreal), and named Mount Royal. He winters in the Québec region, and scurvy takes its toll on his crew, 25 of whom perish. He left in May 1541 for his third and final voyage with 5 ships and some 1,500 men. This time, he brought back what he believed to be gold and diamonds. In the end, it was only iron pyrite and quartz, and therefore worthless. Since Newfoundland joined Confederation, Cabot has been referred to as the discoverer of Canada. However, it must be recognized that Cartier was the first European to describe the life of the natives and to explore the St. Lawrence River, the axis of French settlement in America.

This wax statue of Jacques Cartier was designed by and for Montreal's Musée Grévin (2012-2021). Some of the statues were distributed to various Quebec museums when the Musée Grévin closed.

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Photo by Victor Diaz Lamich