

CelebrateHer

12 inspiring, everyday women are recognized in an ambitious feminist art collaboration, combining portrait paintings and micro-documentaries from artist Aquil Virani with a verbatim sound play crafted by writer Erin Lindsay and directed by Imago Theatre's Micheline Chevrier.

Acknowledgements

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This work was created on the unceded territories of the **Kanien’kehá:ka** (“Mohawk”) Nation in so-called Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

We acknowledge the support of the **Canada Council for the Arts**.





plus
mieux
guérir

Campagne
3-2016

CHU S

Table of Contents

06	Zébida Bendjeddou	32	La Presse Article
08	Clare Byarugaba	34	Call for Nominations
10	Dorothy Dixon Williams	36	Micro-documentaries
12	Shweta Khare	38	Exhibitions & installations
14	Kama La Mackerel	40	Project press & publications
16	Kathy Malas	42	Writer Erin Lindsay
18	Bochra Manai	44	Director Micheline Chevrier
20	Natalie Ramsay	46	Artist Aquil Virani
22	Romita Sur	48	Sound play transcript
24	Naomi Tatty	60	Audience questions
26	Joannie Verreault		
28	Rachel Zellars		



...the very serious-
ism is distraction,
from doing your work,
explaining, over and
over again, your reason for being."
- Toni Morrison (Portland, OR, 1975)

the very serious-
ism is distraction,
from doing your work,
explaining, over and
over again, your reason for being"
on (Portland, OR, 1975)



Zébida Bendjeddou

Zébida est une femme qui inspire le respect. Son travail quotidien semble basé sur sa relation avec les autres, avec elle-même et finalement avec Dieu. Puisque que mon français n'est pas parfait, rencontrer Zébida dans la ville de Québec a ressemblé à un échange interculturel – en utilisant le langage corporel, l'écoute active et le contact visuel, j'ai fait un grand effort pour communiquer mon respect tout en lui posant des questions difficiles, lui demandant de creuser en profondeur. Zébida se définit comme apolitique, une simple bénévole au service du bien de la communauté. Pour moi, c'est son humilité qui brille par-dessus tout. Alors que je quittais la mosquée où l'entretien avait eu lieu, je lui ai demandé quel genre d'art elle aimait : elle m'a répondu qu'elle dessinait des étoiles et des fleurs lorsqu'elle était enfant. Un simple motif au style islamique m'a semblé approprié pour contribuer à la richesse du portrait tout en restant fidèle à sa modestie.

CélébronsLa : Zébida Bendjeddou.

Peinture en aérosol et acrylique sur toile.

65 x 65 pouces. 2018. Exposé à la salle
Morrice et à Collège Rosemont à Montréal.

Certificat de réussite pour le concours
de la Société du portrait du Canada.



Clare Byarugaba

Clare is an amazing listener. She asks good questions. She seems willing to see the good in people. (On our day together, she chatted with this loud barista who I thought was being obnoxious and crass – the kind of guy that yells across the room and calls women he doesn't know "sweetheart." She was really pleasant with him.)

Her demeanour might be related to the fact that she's the only daughter in the family with 7 brothers! Living in Montreal, walking in the Village, I think it's easy to forget the struggles of queer peoples around the world. Clare is a great example of someone who does activist work not necessarily because she's interested in abstract human rights and "politics," but because she's interested in her own survival.

CelebrateHer: Clare Byarugaba.

Acrylic, spray paint on canvas. 65 x 65 inches. 2018. Exhibited at Morrice Hall and Collège Rosemont in Montreal. Featured in F-Word Zine and Art/iculation Magazine.



SOME
UGANDANS
ARE GAY
GET OVER IT

PROUD
GAY
UGANDANS

WE ARE GAY
AND
PROUD

MARCH

GET

© 2015

Dorothy Dixon Williams

Dorothy grew up in the “cradle of the church” as she describes it. She doesn’t like small talk, likely because she values her time and the time of others enough to “go deep or go home.” She has a welcoming warmth about her that puts you at ease and makes you feel seen. She’s a pillar in her community. Dorothy was the only portrait that featured an open mouth – I wanted to capture her beautiful teeth while keeping in line with the strong, unapologetic tone of the portrait poses. Her portrait background highlights the role that faith plays in her life and how music often serves as the medium to express that devotion; the musical concert – with the lyrics as the centrepiece – represent the blurring of the religious and the everyday, of the personal and the political.

CelebrateHer: Dorothy Dixon Williams.
Acrylic, spray paint on canvas. 65 x 65
inches. 2018. Exhibited at Morrice Hall
and Collège Rosemont in Montreal.

Show me how to love as
You have loved me



Shweta Khare

Shweta started to cry when we surprised her back in February.

I interviewed her for about ten minutes under the pretence that I was an employee from McGill asking questions to mature students and their families. Shweta strikes me as someone incredibly grateful for the life she has, even if it's not perfect. Family is so important to different Indian cultures, and her family loves her so much. My own mother moved to Canada and worked while raising a family in Vancouver. To do it all away from the familiarity of your home base is extraordinary. The spray-painted rendition of the henna designs in the background (that she originally created) is meant to elicit questions about what traditions we keep and what traditions we're allowed to do away with.

CelebrateHer: Shweta Khare.
Acrylic, spray paint on canvas.
65 x 65 inches. 2018.
Exhibited at Morrice Hall and
Collège Rosemont in Montreal.



Kama La Mackerel

Kama has this boisterous and contagious laugh; they let the world know. They often have a lot to say; their sentences flow into one another. Sometimes, I'm not sure where the personal ends and the persona begins. They are fabulous, and when it comes to style, they can definitely pull it off. Kama is an artistic ocean of art-making and storytelling; I really wanted to incorporate the positive, political assertions in their portrait by illustrating one of their banner art objects in the background. They explain beautifully that their experience of gender is fluid, like waves of water – it comes and it goes, and it comes, and it goes.

CelebrateHer: Kama La Mackerel.

Acrylic, spray paint on canvas.

65 x 65 inches. 2018.

Exhibited at Morrice Hall and
Collège Rosemont in Montreal.



Kathy Malas

Kathy is a tireless leader. She was nominated by two sisters in her community, Mona and Manel, who are understandably astonished about how she does so much. She's one of those people that uses the same 24 hours that everyone else has in some magical way. And with all of her commitments and responsibilities – working as a speech language pathologist or the Vice President of the Canadian Muslim Forum, or a workshop facilitator in her faith community on spirituality – Manel says you can still phone her at 2am if you're in trouble, and she will answer the call. The fundraising slogan of the CHU Sainte-Justine hospital where she works, “plus mieux guérir” (meaning “heal better”), applied not only to her profession, but to her faith, and her life as a Muslim community member living in Montreal.

CelebrateHer: Kathy Malas.

Acrylic, spray paint on canvas.

65 x 65 inches. 2018.

Exhibited at Morrice Hall and
Collège Rosemont in Montreal.



plus
mieux
guerir

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Bochra Manai

Bochra is a super smart lady with an incredible story. Alia's nomination describes her, among other things, as an "one of the brightest spirits she's ever met." She gives you her full attention. She is a researcher, a professor and an engaged citizen with a PhD in Urban Studies from the INRS-UCS. She's a Muslim woman who chooses not to wear the hijab. She fled from political turmoil in Tunisia and eventually ended up in Montreal via France about ten years ago. The backdrop of her home office – with all of its book-filled shelves and messy, planted greenery – visually represents her academic passion fused with her domestic commitments as a young mother. The only book in the background that is legible among the spray-painted texture is "Aime comme Montréal."

CelebrateHer: Bochra Manai.
Acrylic, spray paint on canvas.
65 x 65 inches. 2018.
Exhibited at Morrice Hall and
Collège Rosemont in Montreal
and OCAD U in Toronto.



Natalie Ramsay

Natalie made a bold decision as a young woman. Growing up in Rach Gia during the Vietnam War, she left her home country at 18, fleeing a communist government and the shadows of sexist marital expectations imposed by her traditional father. She was nominated by one of her daughters, LeeAnn, who told me, “My mom (Natalie) used to tell me to ‘find a man who will help with the laundry.’ I didn’t get it when I was younger, but I get it now.” When she finally arrived in the United States, she built a life for herself as an electrical engineer, eventually switching to software engineering in Northern Virginia. Some of Natalie’s sisters still live the reality she left behind. She’s filled with pride wearing her blazer and going to work, far from the rice paddies of Vietnam that she never chose.

CelebrateHer: Natalie Ramsay.
Acrylic, spray paint on canvas.
65 x 65 inches. 2018.
Exhibited at Morrice Hall and
Collège Rosemont in Montreal.



Romita Sur

Romita is a badass woman of colour. She's almost done with her transsystemic law degree – in both civil and common law – at McGill University. When I visited Rom's apartment, I was reminded of my hospitable Indian "aunties" who would offer me everything they had without hesitation. "We have water, juice, milk, some leftover iced tea. I just made some food, do you want some?" Romita is especially proud of her work with the *Contours* journal that promotes the voices of women in law. She co-founded the Women of Colour Collective that built a community around racialized women in her faculty. A banner that the WOCC commissioned features the words, "Survival, Resilience, Solidarity," so I got in touch with the talented Oakville-based illustrator Izabela Stanic to see if I could remix her artwork into the painting. Izzy was delighted.

(Check out izzystanic.com.)

CelebrateHer: Romita Sur.
Acrylic, spray paint on canvas.
65 x 65 inches. 2018.
Exhibited at Morrice Hall and
Collège Rosemont in Montreal.



Naomi Tatty

Naomi tells it how it is. She's an Inuit woman, a mother, a daughter, a seamstress, and, as her nominator Anna Bunce puts it, "a spoke in the wheel, connecting people and communities together." She works in community health outreach for the Department of Public Health in Nunavut. I had hoped I would be lucky enough to meet Naomi in person while she was visiting Ottawa to accompany her father on a health-related trip, but fortunately, they found what they needed locally. Chatting over the phone with a 3-second time delay proved to be a wonderful exercise in patience and trust. In our conversation, Naomi was very giving of her time and her experiences. On social media, one of Naomi's latest posts reads, "*Takualugilli niruaqtaulautunga*, one of the 12 nominated and selected [for the CelebrateHer project.] It's finally sinking in."

CelebrateHer: Naomi Tatty.
Acrylic, spray paint on canvas.
65 x 65 inches. 2018.
Exhibited at Morrice Hall and
Collège Rosemont in Montreal.



Joannie Verreault

Joannie passe plus de temps derrière qu'en face de la caméra. Je savais qu'elle remarquerait davantage les choix de composition de son portrait que les autres participantes. Le chez-soi qu'elle a créé avec son partenaire Romi ressemblait à une chasse au trésor de projets artistiques. Elle est centrée, au sens propre comme au figuré, parmi l'arrière-plan coloré qui combine deux de ses passions d'une manière symétrique. La palette de couleurs la positionne contre les attentes stéréotypées des « filles qui portent du rose ». Mon intention était d'inclure une référence subtile au halo d'un ange qui émerge des anneaux circulaires de la lentille de la caméra.

CélébronsLa : Joannie Verreault.
Peinture en aérosol et acrylique sur toile.
65 x 65 pouces. 2018. Exposé à la salle
Morrice et à Collège Rosemont à Montréal.



Rachel Zellars

Rachel talks and you listen. She's a single mother, a researcher and educator, and an anti-violence activist. I find her command of language mesmerizing. She holds a PhD in the Department of Integrated Studies within the Faculty of Education at McGill University. I first met Rachel in passing during organizational meetings of the first *Manif des femmes* (Women's March) back in January 2017 when she was serving as the Executive Director of Girls Action Foundation. In addition to her intellect, the humanity and warmth in her leadership style made you feel like, "I want to be on her team." And yet, perhaps unexpectedly in the realm of academia, Rachel is a farm girl. Her favourite quote pays tribute to her scholarly pursuits, floating among the earthy backdrop of farmland in Moravia, New York.

CelebrateHer: Rachel Zellars.

Acrylic, spray paint on canvas. 65 x 65 inches.

2018. Exhibited at Morrice Hall and Collège

Rosemont in Montreal. Featured on

CBC News and Global News Montreal

*"The function, the very serious
function of racism is distraction.
It keeps you from doing your work.
It keeps you explaining, over and
over again, your reason for being."
Toni Morrison (Portland, OR, 1975)*





Portrait of a woman in a headscarf, likely a religious or cultural figure, displayed on a blue background with a geometric pattern.

Portrait of a woman in a headscarf, likely a religious or cultural figure, displayed on a blue background with a geometric pattern.





Portrait of [Name]
[Description]

Portrait of [Name]
[Description]



La Presse Article



ERIC CLÉMENT, LA PRESSE • Published on June 21, 2018

Translated from French and edited for length and clarity.

[...] Bochra Manaï has been in Quebec for nine years. She was born in Tunisia and spent part of her youth in France. As a researcher and teacher in the fields of identity, immigration and radicalization, she holds a doctorate with a focus on *Maghreb* communities who have settled in Montreal. These days, the 35-year-old woman is sharing her experience with the community of Montreal-North by participating in a youth roundtable that has recently been created with the aim of better representing visible minorities within the City of Montreal.

Bochra Manaï's story informs one of the 12 feminist portraits that artist Aquil Virani has produced for his body of work, *CelebrateHer*. The other women featured are Zébida Bendjeddou, Clare Byarugaba, Dorothy Dixon Williams, Shweta Khare, Kama La Mackerel, Kathy Malas, Natalie Ramsay, Romita Sur, Naomi Tatty, Joannie Verreault and Rachel Zellars. [...]

Different women — For *CelebrateHer*, Aquil Virani wanted to feature portrait subjects with varying identities to explore the diversity among women. [...] “When you see women depicted in the art world, the woman is often white, thin,

heterosexual, upper class. The twelve women of *CelebrateHer* subvert this norm. Each has her own story.” [...] These women, some of whom are meeting each other for the first time tomorrow, have not been chosen because they are “compatible” politically. But each woman has agreed to participate in this project to celebrate the diversity of women and their need to fight for their rights.

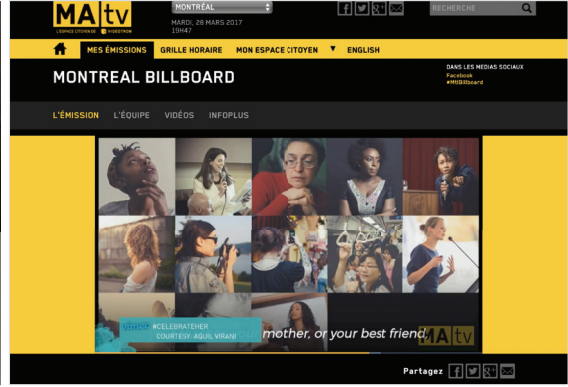
A social artist — Aquil Virani is a deeply committed artist, fascinated by social issues and the richness of diversity. It’s a diversity that he himself embodies with his French and Indian origins. He has already been recognized for his humanitarian art initiatives, notably with the Applied Arts Prize in 2016 for his *Canada’s Self Portrait* project, and with the 2018 Artist for Peace Prize, which was awarded to him last April in Montreal. “As a feminist, my interest in women’s issues stems from my personal relationships with women, including my single-parent mother, as well as my adherence to values such as equality, social justice and human rights,” he writes. “I am determined to contribute concretely and actively to social change through my artistic practice.” [...]

This delicate artistic collaboration has delighted researcher and participant Bochra Manaï. “I liked working with Aquil because he has a nuanced and sensitive understanding of the issues that concern women. His feminist perspective is greatly appreciated. This type of project makes it possible to transform the gaze and realize that women’s struggles are multiple.” [...]

Call for Nominations

CelebrateHer started with an open call to nominate “an inspiring woman in your life.” Nominators – whether daughters, mothers, fathers or friends – answered 5 questions with the option of uploading a few photos. The call was shared online, on television and on the radio as far as we could spread it. The entire cohort of public nominations is available on the *CelebrateHer* website.

- 1. Describe yourself.*
- 2. Tell us the basics about her.*
- 3. Explain how you know her and why you nominated her.*
- 4. Write about why it's important to celebrate women.*
- 5. Express why the world is better with art in it.*



Hint: Age, Location, Occupation, Background, hobbies

3. Explain how you know her and why you nominated her.

Hint: How you met, Relationship, Her character, Best qualities

4. Write about why it's important to celebrate women.

Hint: Because it's 2015. Because ditch. Because feminism.

5. Express why the world is better with art in it.

Hint: Consider the opposite, what art brings you personally

Anything else?



Micro-documentaries

A series of *micro-documentaries* (or “under-a-minute videos”) unveils the creation process of the painted portrait, interwoven with the real voices of these inspiring women as they share their story. **Available on Vimeo or by visiting celebrateher.ca.**

Natalie Ramsay’s video transcript:

“Watching my dad...the disappointment in him when my younger sister was born – that it was a girl, not a boy – and how we were treated differently, y’know? Really really unfairly... Proving the point that girls can be as good as boys ... is pretty much the goal of my life.”

Naomi Tatty’s video transcript:

“We live in a pretty rough part of Iqaluit. We try to make the best of it. I see a lot of broken women that are affected by things like alcohol, addictions, and insecurity, and things like that. And I was always taught by my parents and my grandparents: Help people in need. Welcome them. Always give a helping hand.”



Exhibitions & installations

CelebrateHer was exhibited in various contexts, in full and in part, at various venues throughout the project.

Morrice Hall, McGill University, Montreal.

Collège de Rosemont, Montreal.

“Archipelago: Living Museum,”

Rialto Theatre, Montreal.

Iftar event during Ramadan,

La Table Fleurie d’Algerie, Montreal.

“Feminist Art Collective – Narrative Healing,”

OCAD University, Toronto.



Project press & publications

La Presse. « Aquil Virani célèbre la diversité des femmes » Éric Clément. Montreal. • **Global News.** “CelebrateHer: Twelve inspiring, everyday women.” Laura Casella. Montreal. • **Global News.** “Notable women for an extraordinary project.” Laura Casella. Montreal. • **Art/iculation** (Vol. 3, Art of Healing). “Perfect Metaphor.” Aquil Virani. Montreal. • **MAtv.** “#CelebrateHer on Montreal Billboard.” Kim Sullivan and Tina Tennerriello. Montreal. • **F-Word Zine.** “CelebrateHer.” Aquil Virani. Montreal. • **Le Devoir.** « De l’art comme outil pacifiste au MBAM. » Caroline Montpetit. Montréal. • **Portrait Society of Canada** – Winners (online exhibition). portraitsociety.ca. Toronto. • **CBC Radio’s Homerun.** “CelebrateHer with honouree Rachel Zellars.” Sue Smith. Montreal. • **CKUT Radio’s Upstage.** “Interview with visual artist Aquil Virani.” Sarah Deshaies. Montreal. • **CBC Radio 1.** “Rialto Theatre transformed into museum of live performances.” Nantali Indongo. • **CTV.** “What’s On: Archipelago.” Christine Long. Montreal.



LA PRESSE CA DÉBATS 27°C MONTREAL Charger de ville

ACTUALITÉS INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRES SPORTS AUTO ARTS CINÉMA VIVRE VINS VOYAGE MAISON TECHNIQUE

Arts visuels Festivals Livres Médias Musiques Spectacles et théâtre Télévision Vie de stars Diversiers

Accueil > Arts > Arts visuels > Aquil Virani célèbre la diversité des femmes

Publié le 21 juin 2018 à 11h33 | Mis à jour le 21 juin 2018 à 11h33

Aquil Virani célèbre la diversité des femmes



ÉRIC CLÉMENT
La Presse

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DU MÊME AUTEUR
Kev Adams, quand les succès s'enchâssent
Nao Gotō manifeste à Harvard

Demain et samedi, au pavillon Morrice de l'Université McGill, l'artiste visuel Aquil Virani et Imago Theatre organiseront cinq rencontres avec le public pour célébrer 12 femmes inspirantes d'ici et d'ailleurs. Un rendez-vous avec la peinture et la diversité des femmes.

Bochra Manaï est au Québec depuis neuf ans. Elle est née en Tunisie et a vécu une partie de sa jeunesse en France. Chercheuse et enseignante dans les domaines de l'identité, de l'immigration et de la radicalisation, elle est titulaire d'un doctorat sur l'ethnicité maghrébine à Montréal.

Actuellement, cette femme de 35 ans fait bénéficier la communauté de Montréal-Nord de son expérience en participant



LES PLUS POPULAIRES - ARTS

Dernière heure	Dernier jour	Dernière semaine
(09:29)	Alfano Robert Lapage: le milieu du théâtre accuse le coup	
(10:20)	Les grosses tournées font les gros revenus, avec L2 en tête	
(11:01)	Kev Adams: quand les succès s'enchâssent	
(13:01)	À la recherche du titre de livre idéal	

Tous les plus populaires de la section Arts sur [laPresse.ca](#)

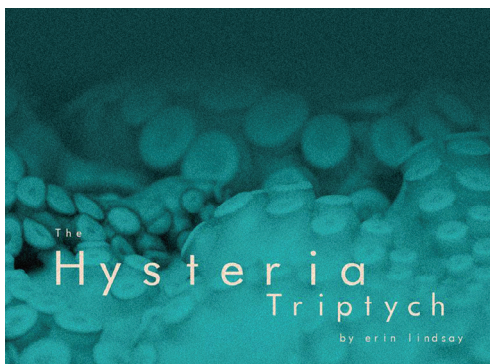
AUTRES CONTENUS POPULAIRES

Auto	Cinéma	Maison
(19:03)	Courriel des lecteurs - Un véhicule qui ne semble pas accomplir sa fonction	
(05:00)	Une Bentley volée par Bachlam: l'histoire en vedette au Michigan	
(12:04)	Honda Mean Mower V2: un tracteur pour les paysagistes encore plus pressés	
(12:24)	Une Aston Martin volante digne de James Bond	
(12:42)	Ilaco d'essai - Subaru Ancon 2019: l'heure de la revanche ?	

Writer Erin Lindsay

Erin is a writer and creator currently enrolled in the MFA Creative Writing Program at the University of British Columbia. She is an alumni of Playwrights' Workshop's Creator's Unit, the recipient of a SSHRC grant for her current thesis work, a former Associate Artist at Imago Theatre and their current Artist in Residence where she is working on a contemporary adaptation of Lysistrata. Erin is interested in supporting and creating work that questions the status quo and encourages critical thinking and empathy. She is currently working on a novel addressing systemic issues in the Canadian healthcare system, while collaborating on a libretto, and a place-based poetry project.

Follow her on instagram @crowlake.



Again, via: booming, hastily constructed, poised for warp-speed (tens of millions of) processing plants, and prisons.

Every move, word, relationship mineable.

And keys to gleaming showroom at dead precipice of public money and warmed-over appetites.

A rush-job, almost everything: edge, myriad, sheer volume.

soft and goodsolid pixels
not points marched out to
the pier no this is
glazeless doorless
and laughing unjudged
unhid a raft



Director

Micheline Chevrier

Micheline has worked across Canada and abroad for over thirty years as a director, artistic director and dramaturg. As a director, she has worked at such theatres as The Shaw Festival, the National Arts Centre, Theatre Calgary, Alberta Theatre Projects, the Citadel, the Globe Theatre, Prairie Theatre Exchange, Manitoba Theatre Centre, Canadian Stage, Young People’s Theatre, Théâtre français de Toronto, the Centaur Theatre, Segal Centre, Geordie Productions, Imago Theatre, Theatre New Brunswick and BeMe Productions (Barcelona and Munich). Micheline was the Artistic Director of the Great Canadian Theatre Company from 1995 to 2000, Associate Artistic Director at Theatre New Brunswick, Associate Artist at Toronto’s Canadian Stage and is currently the Artistic and Executive Director at Imago Theatre (visit imagotheatre.ca). She has also taught at the National Theatre School and several universities across the country.



THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS ONE MONOLITHIC HISTORY.

HISTORY REQUIRES REVISION.



Artist Aquil Virani

Aquil is an Ismaili Muslim visual artist of Indian and French heritage who often integrates public participation into his socially-conscious art projects. Awarded as the “Artist of the Year” by the Quebec-based collective “Artists for Peace,” his work is rooted somewhere between fine art and activism. He exhibited his award-winning *Canada’s Self Portrait* project at the Canadian Museum of Immigration in Halifax after integrating 800+ participant submissions into a single artwork. Virani premiered his *Postering Peace* documentary at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. He is presently working on a commemorative portrait series honouring the 6 Muslim men killed at a terrorist attack in Quebec City on January 29, 2017, according to the wishes of the widows and their families; the community-driven arts initiative is supported by grants from the Silk Road Institute, TakingITGlobal and the Government of Canada. As curator Celine Le Merlus explains, “his approach, which aims not simply to assert a personal point of view on a pressing social issue, but also to facilitate opportunities for others to express themselves freely – to speak and be heard – is characteristic of all of Virani’s work.” **Learn more by visiting aquil.ca.**



Sound play transcript

Sound play created by Erin Lindsay

Natalie: Oh, oh, okay, so we start now?

Aquil: Yeah, yeah, whenever you're ready.

Natalie: Oh, I thought ... (laughing)

Aquil: Oh, were you waiting for me to tell you to start? (laughing)

LeeAnn and Vanessa: (laughing)

Aquil: Good, I was waiting for you. Okay...That was my bad.

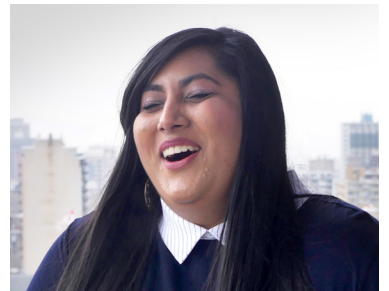
So I'll give you a 3, 2 ...

Natalie, LeeAnn and Vanessa: (laughing)

Aquil: (pauses) Are we ready? Alright. 3, 2 ...

Kama: Okay, yes. So there is such a thing as womanhood in contemporary Western societies. And a lot of times, that idea of womanhood is defined in a singular way. It's the idea that there is only one kind of womanhood. Which typically means like white, middle class, skinny,

Dorothy: And even as a woman of colour, I think that's one of the things that I recognized at my job...When I looked at my schoolboard and I saw the colour and how white it was, I thought, "Wow this is not good," but I have



the opportunity to show them... This is how a black woman - who appears confident ('cause I'm not always confident) - but who appears confident... This is how we do things. This is how we work.

Romita: Sometimes you don't have a choice. Sometimes you just have to go and do things because of the space you are in. So, I guess for me, in terms of defining womanhood... When things are tough, you just "get going" and women often do that. And so that's how I see it I guess.

Clare: So... to be a lesbian and a woman in a country like Uganda makes you kind of like the poster child of non-conformity.

Shweta: The girls need to realize that the capacity that they have is not less than men's. And also, after marriage, it's not only the burden that they take over of the family, they have more than that...that they can do.

Rachel: And I think about how tremendously the arc of queerness has shifted to make space... to just broaden the category of "woman" in ways I certainly didn't see when I was a young woman. And so I want to just acknowledge how important that feels as a starting place for me, to acknowledge how much wider, if you will, how much more spacious the category of "woman" has become.

[Music]

Aquil: And what's the goal, and personally, what do you get out of it?

Romita: Work towards diversity in the legal profession. Work towards mentorship as well as just advocating for racialized students in the legal community.

Kama: What I think remains with me and sustains me the most is that ... finding trans sisterhood actually. Finding other trans women – particularly, in my case, finding other trans women of colour.

Rachel: And I think that any work that fundamentally is interested in the survivals (one) and creating a brilliant future for black life...

Bochra : Je veux révéler ... tout ce qui est invisibilisé, tout ce qui est dans l'ombre, tout ce qui n'est pas vu, mais qui est pourtant vécu parfois avec difficulté...

Natalie: Making a difference, you know. Proving the point that girls can be as good as boys is pretty much the goal of my life.

Kama: Basically, all the doors just get closed in your face...All the doors just get... Bam, Bam, Bam.. they just get closed in your face... in many cases.

Shweta: I am just trying to fight out with a lot of things within me, I guess...Not outside...so yeah, I am resilient with that... maybe that's what it is.

Romita: Well, I remember just before I went through the interview process, somebody told me to remove “Women of Colour Collective” and “Law Needs Feminism” from my resume. And to me, that was alarming because ... especially “Women of Colour Collective” is a project that is very close to my heart. It really defines my law school experience and my leadership experience. And so, to remove that, didn't seem right to me. I felt that if I have to remove something that is so core to who I am, maybe that's not the right fit for me. Maybe I don't need to be interviewing at that place.

Bochra : Dans le fond, à dix ans, on a fui le pays en passant par l'Algérie. Donc on a traversé à pieds pour plusieurs jours. Puis, donc, on est partie en

Algérie avant de demander l'asile politique en France. Donc, en fait, à dix ans, j'ai commencé l'école en France en étant réfugiée. Donc, j'ai découvert ce que c'est qui est une frontière, j'ai découvert ce qui est le racisme, j'ai découvert ce qui être étrangère en fait très jeune...

Kama: You know, when you've been displaced... when there's been a genocide enacted against your people, when you've been cut from your culture, your land, your history, your family... everything that makes you human, basically. But despite all of this, you still get out of bed every day. You put yourself out into the world. You decide not to disappear...When you live in a society that is structured...

Zévida : J'espère que nous avançons vers le meilleur et ... que le Quebec et le Canada, et tout ça, soient un pays. C'est multiculturel, mais qui soit formé une grande famille, qui est composé d'une mosaïque. Et cette mosaïque se donnera la main. Puis, vivre dans la paix et le bonheur et ... bâtir ce pays. C'est surtout ça. Toute cette violence – peut-importe ici ou d'ailleurs, la – ils apparaissent parce que... c'est devenu trop, c'est trop... mais qu'est-ce qu'on doit faire? On ne sait pas. Mais peut-etre, juste s'aimer les uns and les autre. C'est tout. Respecter les uns et les autres. Je pense que la vie est très simple à vivre.

[Music]

Aquil: So what does responsible representation look like in the context of man painting a feminist portrait series? What are some things I should consider?

Romita: I think first is, of course, representation. Like make sure there a wide

diversity of women who are there. People who are racialized, or indigenous or white or what have you. The other thing is also the way a woman looks because not every woman looks quote-unquote feminine.

Dorothy: And so, yeah, I'm self-conscious, I am a self-conscious woman. I know my flaws. I know MAC makeup can only do so much. But you know what? It's an interesting time because I actually told myself that I would not be crippled by fear or insecurity. I would just do it. And it's kind of my mantra: In spite of... Just do it.

Kama: The major thing around it has been navigating power dynamics around, like, who is holding the camera...because that's the other thing about photography, you know, you have somebody else who actually frames ... the picture that is being taken. So learning in that sense as well, because you aren't speaking, you are not talking. It's just you. It's just your body. It's just your face. It's just your eyes! (A lot of the time, it's just the eyes.)

Rachel: The first thing that came up for me was: when I did the CBC campaign, I ultimately hated the photo they used and, like, intentionally put it on the wall so I would have to look at it and grapple with what I didn't like about it... Maybe no pimples. I have a pimple. [Laughs]

Aquil: Good, yeah, I don't have to paint that. You know? It's all good. Great. And okay, I think my last question ... although I just want to make sure on that theme ... what does it mean for a white[-passing] man (a cis-heterosexual white[-passing] man) to paint ... however you identify? So what are some things for me to consider (if you want to maybe phrase it in that way)?

Rachel: Great! It means to ask questions like you just asked, and to trust the

judgement of the person who has the most to lose in that representation. Right? For me, that ties very much to my thoughts about cultural appropriation. So, you know, trust the judgement, the perception, the words, the discontents, the appreciations of the person that has the most to lose in that representation.

[Music]

Kama: I think about this. And I do think about my gender also as the figure of the ocean for me. To go back to the symbol of the ocean. I like the fluidity of the ocean because, for me, the ocean also captures how fluid I feel in my gender. It's like waves. It comes and it leaves. It comes and it leaves, and that's how I also think about my relationship to masculinity and femininity.

Shweta: But the thing is... when I see the rural area of India and the parents in rural areas, yes, I feel bad for those girls. There is definitely a restriction for those girls to pursue their studies, or to pursue their career, or even to come up with an open mindset or say that "I want to do this" or anything that they think is good for them. They are not allowed to do so. (So that's before marriage, as well as after marriage, it continues on after marriage.) And with two different ... lives the girls are living, it requires a lot of sacrifices from the girls. And that's how I see it from the Indian social perspective. They are asked to sacrifice more than men in general.

Kama: I think also that it's important to remember that gender is a social construct. It's a cultural construct. It differs from cultures to cultures. Like, the ways in which masculinity is understood in a North American Canadian

context is different to the ways in which masculinity is understood, and portrayed and lived, in (let's say) a South Indian context.

Clare: I feel like, as women in Uganda, you kind of have to adhere to pre-planned or pre-determined social norms that are not necessarily always to your best advantage.

Natalie: Especially with my father, he just ... his goal was to raise a girl and marry her off. That's his "duty." And he did that with two of my sisters. And I determined that ... I do not want to live that life. You know? Marry somebody you don't know? You don't love? And the life that you have no control over.

Clare: These social norms are usually meant to protect the patriarchy. These social norms are meant to protect some of our male privilege that we've grown up with. That ... we have been told not to question. Some of these social norms are really to keep women in check.

Joannie : Encore une fois, j'ai un peu de difficulté en positionner là dedans par rapport justement aux genres parce que ... ça était ...le genre ... je pense ... les roles par rapport aux genres, ça était inventé par nous, donc on sait nous-même en cabaner en quelques choses, [pris] nous-même, dans cet espace de cache-la, par rapport à la société. Donc, c'est difficile de parler par rapport à ça parce que, justement, il y a tellement encore de choses à faire, même si qu'il y a beaucoup de choses qui ont été fait déjà. Donc, oui, si c'était basé un peu comme réponse-là, mais j'ai la difficulté à mettre les mots...

Bochra: J'ai pu voir que les hommes peuvent être forts et vulnérables et que les

femmes pouvaient être vulnérables mais très fortes aussi. Et donc, en fait, ... pendant très longtemps, ... pour moi, le féminisme, c'était juste une évidence...c'est comme: C'est une évidence que nous devons être égaux. C'est comme: It's obvious...

Naomi: About that...a lot of the Inuit up here (and the women specifically) ... are silent about their feelings and hiding and I just tell these ladies, like, "Break your silence, just open up, and [it will be the reason] you'll feel so much better."

[Music]

Aquil: Do you consider yourself an activist?

Bochra: Yup!

Shweta: For me, I feel I am [an] activist.

Natalie: I guess I [would] not consider myself an activist, but I have a lot of thought about it and I have a desire ...with what I want to do.

Romita: Now, the answer is still yes, but my activism has changed.

Kama: I'm not interested in activism with a big A ... and the "dismantling of the structures" and all of this. I'm more interested in everyday actions.

Bochra : Pour moi, toute est dans l'intention. Toute est dans la façon avec laquelle on participe à faire que les autres discutent, faire que [il y a] des espaces de discussion, non pas seulement pour soi, mais avec les autres and pour les autres.

Zébida : ... Bah, moi, je suis bénévole tout simplement. Militante ? Oui, pour le bien. Oui, je milite pour le bien.

Bochra : On est emporté par l'idée que ... si tu es visible, c'est parce que tu fais quelque chose de bien. (Et si tu n'es pas visible, tu n'existes pas.)

Rachel: So I do think of myself as an activist. And, you know, I really do wish that ... all of us have an understanding of activism that isn't loaded with ... either this negative or hyper-positive meaning. And I wish that our activism would focus on one fundamental question, and that question is: What does my relationship look like with someone in my community or neighbourhood or school or job ... place that doesn't have enough? What does my relationship look like with that person who doesn't have... enough, knowing that I barely have enough sometimes? What kind of things can I bring or support in that person's life (or build in that person's life) to lift that person up, and to affect the conditions that make impossible the really rudimentary things that we walk through each day for that human being? For me, that is the best kind of activism because that is where most of the world lives.

[Music]

Aquil: Do you have any advice for ... (let's say) men who are trying to make the world a better place and fight for equality of women? (Some call these people allies.) Do you have any thoughts? What would you say to a man who came up to you and said "I want to make things better for women." Do you have any advice... I guess, what would you say to them? And there's no right answer.

Shweta: So, if a man comes to me and says, "I want to make a better place

for women." I would say just be careful. [Laughs.] You cannot trust ... you cannot trust everyone, and those who are coming to say this to you ... it's not like every man is going to be like that. Maybe there are men. But ... do the best, and ... find out about the man himself first (that's very important) and then take the next step.

Bochra : La question féministe n'appartient pas seulement aux femmes. Elle appartient toute la société. Tout comme la question du racisme n'appartient pas seulement aux (personnes) racisés. Elle appartient à tout la société. Si on se réfléchit comme société, on doit (dans ces moments et ces espaces) inclure aussi celui à qui on veut parler.

Clare: I would say, "Educate yourself. Unlearn what you've been taught. Allow yourself to question the social norms that allow your kind of thinking. And more importantly, understand why someone else would say, 'Sexism is real.'"

Natalie: But I wish I could go back and do it differently. Like, actively get him involved and make him more aware about the fact that it's totally unfair. ... And [tell him] he did not do enough. Rather than just accepting it and going on with your life, trying to do everything.

Aquil: Parents, now, in this new generation are going to teach not their girls to dress differently, but their guys to behave differently. So I want you to [say], "In my role as a mother, I will teach my son to..."

Bochra : En tant que mère d'un garçon, je lui enseignerai que ... il faut qu'il soit sensible, justement, aux problématiques que peuvent vivre les femmes. Je lui enseignerai, je pense surtout, qu'il faut lui-même, qu'il sort de la masculinité tel que ... comme un sort d'injonction. Il y a une injonction pour

que les hommes soient virile, qu'ils jouent un certain rôle...et je pense que je lui enseignerai qu'il ne faut ni enfermer les femmes dans cette injonction à la beauté, puis à la superficialité, ni qu'il entre dans l'injonction faites aux hommes à la masculinité, et la grande merveille des hommes et du patriarcat...et cetera...alors, je pense que je lui enseignerai la sensibilité, l'éthique, et le fait que ...il faut qu'il agisse avec toutes les citoyennes et toutes les citoyens autour de lui, comme il aimerait ... qu'on soit égalitaire, inclusif avec ... et qu' pour ca, il faut avoir un certain sensibilité sociale...

Aquil: I would say ... Allyship is definitely complicated. One of the ways it's complicated is that: You have to constantly remind yourself that good intentions aren't enough...Right? And so, you know ... who you are and you trust that you have the right reasons in mind, but ... there's always work to be done. And there's work to be done both ... when I mention "work," I mean work to be done in the community and in society, but there's also work to be done, like, internally. So there are internal biases, and there are the things that we've grown up with that we constantly have to think about. And work to be done in terms of ... making sure that you're open to change and open to hearing people out.

Rachel: I mean last, it's possible and it's necessary...and again, that bridge is seldom forged because (well, for different reasons, but that bridge is seldom forged because) it's hard and it's painful to sit down and have real frank conversations about difference. And just letting those things be as they are. And then finding ways to work around that difference in ways that are mutually respectful... It's possible though.

[End]

Audience Questions

CelebrateHer audience members at Morrice Hall were asked to answer three questions at the end of each show. Below is a selection of their responses.

1. What is womanhood to you?

Womanhood is whatever you want it to be + sexy full energy + electricity + sisterhood with other women + love • Love, Heart, Sensitivity, Self Awareness, Resilience, Trauma, Hurt, Questions, Care, Womanhood is centering • Follow her passions, determination/fight for liberty/equality • Womanhood is to try to do justice to mother earth, our ancestors, and all the creatures – no legged, two legged, four + more that roam the earth, so we may live together in harmony + remember our humanity • As broad, as complex, as rich as your imagination! • So many degrees and expressions of womanhood. It cannot be one thing • Power, grace, empathy (sensibility). • Womanhood is personhood with man-made caveats imposed upon it. And that's starting to change • It's humanity, complexity, and diversity. No more boxes! • Being strong and dedicated, as a man I'm not always sure how to reply. Strength above all. • Sacrifice, strong, keeping family together with love. • I don't know. I really don't know what to answer. • I think of my

mother. I think of my wife. It is something that will never live in me, that I admire and cherish. Womanhood has grace. Womanhood is strength. Womanhood carries wisdom and a connection with the earth, nature, the universe beyond. • I don't know. • It is a place where women can be... women. And girls can be who they want to be and when. • Something that is clearly better to spend time celebrating than defining. • A construct • It is what women think of themselves. • Womanhood = all women together • Not sure anymore!

2. What images might you put in the background of your own portrait?

Des fleurs parce que cela me rappelle la beauté de Dieu. • The hat of success / school (graduation cap) • Sunshine, migrating birds. • Words that represent how strong women in general are, like "powerful." • People would be in the background without people I do not arise to my full potential; I would not be who I am; nor would I have purpose. • Flying the birds in the blue sky towards the up. • Je suis une amoureuxse des fleurs, alors aussi simple que des fleurs! Elle represent la beauté, l'odorat, la vue, l'émerveillement, le calme, la fraîcheur, le calme, Dieu! • The recycling symbol because I'm passionate about the environment. • An open pomegranate. • Definitely a huge wall of plants! • I am not perfect • An eye topped with fire and flowing with tears. Always like that as a symbol. Strength and vulnerability. • A jungle. • World peace. My symbol = a pencil/pen (I am an artist) • Don't know! • An image representing audacity

and strength. • Heart. • A forest? • Perhaps a shoreline... Perhaps the raw fabrics of a workshop... Fabrics, wood, glue, and exacto... Perhaps a fox peeking out of the forest... • L'image de l'océan, simplement our sa force et sa beauté. La me rest simple mais tellement tiche en pureté. Cette creation de Dieu et tout simplement magnifique!! • Stars and moons (moons on the top left, stars everywhere) • A bird. • I would like to have hearts as I believe love should be spread out around the world! Love all serve all! • In my country, my lovely mother and here in Montreal, for sure: Micheline!! She is my hero as she knows that. • Wild gardens full of healing plants • Dog-bird.

3. Ask me your hardest question about what you just experienced.

Was there a reason behind painting mostly women of color? Thanks for giving WOC [Women of Colour] the space! • No questions, sorry! I loved listening voices from all of them and show was a nice experience / It was emotional. • Why are women still validated only when they are portrayed by a man? • Avez-vous pensé laisser tomber le projet en réalisant qu'il demande beaucoup de temps? • How do you figure out their deepest part of their characteristics as your concept of your artwork? • What motivates you as an artist to continue? • This is only a small cross-section of the important women in / around Montreal. How did you decide the limit? And did you make the cross to represent the cross-section? • What are the timelines of each painting you did? (When did you start and finish each one?) • How do men emotionally feel about women's struggles? (As

a woman, it's inspiring to know that men ever care about these women, so thank you. <3) • Qu'est-ce qu c'est l'élément déclencheur de ce projet? • Why? Pourquoi es-tu sensible à la cause des femmes? • Great exhibition, but why as a cis male are you presenting on validating womanhood? Beautiful work. • Why sitting portraits? • What is your next creative project because this one was just so inspiring. Thanks Aquil! • Overwhelming experience. • Although you mentioned being a white cis male many times, you ended the oral presentation with a question imploring your interviewees to discuss the difficulties of being an ally. Why did you choose to end the conversation by inviting women to do emotional labour for men? • Create a good sensation between my community and my art. I mean, whole of the obstacles that we have as an Iranian Woman. • What is truly the center of this work? • Did any women find this a difficult choice of inclusion? All 12 portraits are beautiful and compelling. • How can celebrating women become more normal, happen more often, and finally no longer feel exceptional and novel? • How can we center voices like these more? (Outside of spaces like this/within white hetero-patriarchy) • Why was there no boy interview? • When is the next event? • How do you navigate acknowledging your privilege as a cis-man, while operating a project that privileges marginalized identities? • While working and making these artworks, are you at the same time healing your personal wounds?







**Who are you
celebrating today?**

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