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BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Statement by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Wednesday, February 27, 2019

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, today I pay tribute to Black History Month, honouring contributions of Canada's Black visual artists. Too little is known about them and their work; far too little is exhibited.

Canada's Black artists do, and have done, excellent work — steeped in insights and honesty. Their probing of their realities, identities and roots, expressed in every visual medium — painting, film, sculpture, prints, textiles and ceramics — is critically important and has been for well over 100 years. I salute their integrity, their vision and the substance of their work.

Do you know that one of the first trained professional resident artists in British Columbia was Black? Grafton Tyler Brown arrived in Victoria from the West Coast of the U.S. in 1882 and lived there until 1884, before returning to the U.S. His depictions of Esquimalt Harbour and B.C.'s Interior were exhibited in Victoria in 1883 and sold then. They command impressive dollars at auction today.

The Royal Ontario Museum presented an excellent exhibition last year of the work of contemporary Black artists, "Here We Are Here." I applaud the work of Concordia University being done with Black artists. In my view, Nova Scotia's filmmaker Sylvia Hamilton is a national treasure, her work constructively bearing witness to a dark part of Canada's history.

I could name many, but I will focus on two Manitoba artists: Yisa Akinbolaji and Ekene Maduka.

Yisa's message is rich, exploring his Nigerian roots, overlaid with Manitoba's culture, his home for 22 years. He calls us to understand and cherish our human history and natural environment. His painting *Stolen Identities* effectively ties these streams together; his portrait of Louis Riel in the centre, surrounded by Manitoba birch trees painted with colours and patterns evoking the natural growth in Nigeria. The colours and patterning are rich, reflecting both his home and our northern lights.

In her self-representations, Ekene Maduka shares her personal experiences, thoughts and concerns. Inquisitive and strong, she is set to ensure creative diversity in a male, Western-dominated art world.

Senators, let's engage with the creative riches around us and learn from the lives and insights of others as we seek to make this place a better one. As Black History Month comes to its 2019 close, I thank and honour Canada's Black artists for the excellence and courage with which they have presented their concerns and stories. The poignancy and pride embedded in their art is a clarion call for greater understanding of who we are and for Canada's values. Their work is deserving of celebration. Thank you.
