



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## **HONOURING CANADA'S BLACK ARTISTS**

Statement by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Wednesday, September 30, 2020

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### HONOURING CANADA'S BLACK ARTISTS

**Hon. Patricia Bovey:** Honourable senators, what a treat it is to be back here. It was surreal watching the proceedings from my computer at home. I felt like a melted timepiece in Dali's 1931 painting *The Persistence of Memory*.

Talking art, I thank all who had a hand in the Senate presentation *Honouring Canada's Black Artists* installed in the foyer outside this chamber. I thank our Speaker for allowing the use of the space, the Advisory Working Group on Artwork and Heritage, CIBA steering members, Senators Moodie and Ravalia, my staff, Senate curator Tamara Dolan and our administration. I particularly applaud and thank the artists for their visual insights and for permission to show these works for our and Canadians' reflection.

What is the goal of this wall? It is essential that the Canadian voices we hear and present reflect the diversity and depth of our regions and nation. As discussed for several years at the Advisory Working Group on Artwork and Heritage meetings, that includes Indigenous art, work from multiple diversities and from all parts of Canada. Stay tuned — ideas are under discussion.

This installation, the first by Canadian Black artists in the Senate, supports the Black Lives Matter movement. In recommending it, I felt it was important to start in the West. Voices by Black western communities are not heard as those in other parts of the

country are. I also wanted to explore several media by both a Canadian-born and an immigrant artist.

Yisa Akinbolaji, now a Canadian citizen living in Winnipeg, emigrated from Nigeria in 1997. Formerly on the Manitoba Arts Council and a past president of the Manitoba Society of Artists, he is a co-founder of the Creative Foundation to empower youth of multiple cultures. His 2018 painting, *Stolen Identities*, depicts Louis Riel in a dream catcher set in Manitoba's woods. He fuses the rich colours and patterns of his native Nigeria with the realities of Canadian history and its present. Throughout the work, rhythmic recurring circles echoing the dream catcher call for respect and understanding among cultures.

Chantal Gibson, award-winning poet, artist and professor at Vancouver's Simon Fraser University, has exhibited widely and lectured nationally and internationally. Born in Quebec, her Nova Scotian ancestral roots are long. This work underlines the urgency to include Black history in Canada's histories. Part of her *Altered Books* series, she did *Who's Who in Canada 1927* in 2014. She cut pages from the book and filled its cover with interwoven black cotton braids of varying sizes symbolizing the strong interconnections and contributions of Canada's Black communities. The e-reader turns the pages of the original volume, revealing photographs of its "notables"— all White men. Her message is poignant and clear.

The national response to this installation has been overwhelming. May we as senators and Canadians listen and build on the messages these works convey. Thank you.

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