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News

Diplomats raised concern for safety of Canadian-supported female White Helmet members days before daring 2018 rescue, emails show

BY NEIL MOSS

In the summer of 2018, as the Assad government was consolidating its position in southern Syria, Canadian officials were working behind the scenes to protect members of the White Helmets—including women members whose participation

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Co-managed approach, self-governing fisheries the answer to long-simmering lobster dispute, says Senator

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN

The federal government should pursue a co-managed fishing system that accepts First Nation

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News

New Senate art display is the first ever to feature Black artists

Manitoba Senator Patricia Bovey is pushing to see more diversity represented in the art hanging throughout the building the Upper Chamber calls home, calling the new display the 'first iteration' of those efforts.



Sen. Patricia Bovey watches as Yisa Akinbolaji's *Stolen Identities* is installed in the Senate of Canada Building on Sept. 18. Photograph courtesy of the Senate of Canada

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

The portraits of past Speakers and monarchs—white man, after predominantly white man,

aside from Queens Victoria and Elizabeth and two Speakers—have long decorated the halls of the Senate, but a new display is breathing new life, and represen-

tation, into the space. "I'm a firm believer that the arts are an international lan-

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News

Feds strike working groups to tackle delayed MMIWG action plan

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN

The Liberal government has struck 10 working groups to fulfill its Throne Speech promise of an accelerated timeline to complete the already delayed action plan on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

In the weeks before the one-year anniversary of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous

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News

Feds trumpet uncertain WTO reform to protect Canada from trade whims of superpowers

BY NEIL MOSS

With growing trade uncertainty around the globe, the Liberal government is trumpeting its leadership of a group of likeminded nations to reform the

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New Senate art display is the first ever to feature Black artists

Manitoba Senator Patricia Bovey is pushing to see more diversity represented in the art hanging throughout the building the Upper Chamber calls home, calling the new display the 'first iteration' of those efforts.

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guage, along with movement and music, and that it is our artists who really reach into the soul of who we are as individuals, as regions, and as a nation," said Manitoba Senator Patricia Bovey, a member of the Progressive Senate Group, who spearheaded the installation of the new display through her role as chair of the Senate's artwork and heritage working group.



Sen. Bovey was on site to watch the new display being installed in the Senate Building on Sept. 18. Photograph courtesy of the Senate of Canada

"In the Senate ... one of our jobs is to represent our regions, right, and so it's been very apparent to me that [what] I think we should be looking at is the art hanging in the Senate."

Sen. Bovey said she was already considering how to increase the representation reflected in the Senate's art displays when "everything fell into place" on the night of June 5, as she watched Black Lives Matter protests take to the streets of Winnipeg.

"I thought, 'now's the time.' We had the opportunity to represent and honour Canada's Black artists," who have made "tremendous contributions to the visual expression in this country," said Sen. Bovey.

Installed on Sept. 18, the two-piece display is the first ever to feature work by Black artists in the Senate. It's been given a central home, sitting in the foyer outside the Red Chamber, at the foot of the stairs that lead up to the galleries, by which Senators, staff, and visitors will regularly pass—the latter, that is, when the building re-opens to the public. The pieces are on loan until the end of June 2021; if and when public tours re-open before then, the display will be included as a new stop.

It includes a vibrant acrylic and oil on canvas painting, *Stolen Identities*, by Winnipeg-based Nigerian-Canadian artist Yisa Akin-

bolaji, that features Louis Riel framed by a Métis dream catcher and poplar trees, alongside a sculpture molded from a 1927 edition of *Who's Who in Canada*, by



The two-piece display, pictured in situ in the foyer outside the Senate Chamber on Sept. 25. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Vancouver-based artist and poet Chantal Gibson. Ms. Gibson's *Who's Who* is accompanied by an e-reader showing the original pages of the book—a who's who of white Canadians of the time—which have been threaded through with black cotton.

Not counting artwork rented and displayed by individual Senators in their offices, the Upper Chamber's collection includes 225 works of art, plus 65 pieces currently on loan. Of those, the two works installed this month are the only pieces by Black artists.

"Historically, artworks displayed in the Senate have included portraits of former Senators, Speakers, and the British monarchy. Over time, the collection has grown to include works depicting Senate and Parliamentary history, the French monarchy, landscapes, and works by Indigenous artists," explained a Senate spokesperson in an email response to *The Hill Times*.



Chantal Gibson is pictured with another of her pieces sculpted from an old book of Canadian history. Photograph courtesy of Marianne Meadahl

"The recent installation of two works by Black Canadian artists marks another step in the Senate art collection's evolution."

With 50 years of experience working in the arts as a gallery director, curator, and historian, before her appointment to the Upper Chamber in 2016, Sen. Bovey said she was already familiar with the artists and works she ultimately recommended for approval—approval she said she was "thrilled" to get "very quickly" from not only the four-member working group and the Senate Internal Economy, Budgets, and Administration Committee to which it reports, but the Senate Speaker's office as well.

"I made the suggestion of the two specific pieces. I thought if we were going to get this fast they

needed to see exactly what I was proposing," she explained.

Along with wanting to give voice to Black artists from Western Canada, who she said aren't "heard nearly, nearly enough," Sen. Bovey said she sought out works that used different mediums, and balanced Canadian-born and new Canadian talent, by artists who "already had a national and international reputation and had contributed significantly" to the field.

Reached by *The Hill Times* last week, both artists said they were honoured to have their works hung in the Senate Building—an installation both hope to eventually see in person, having been unable to attend the Sept. 18 event as a result of COVID-19.

Mr. Akinbolaji completed *Stolen Identities* back in 2018. He said his inspiration came "after several years of hearing the recurring news" of missing Indigenous women and girls.

"I felt the need to advocate through a body of work to address violence against Indigenous women and girls of our country. When someone is missing, she is one of us, and we should all be concerned," he said in an email, adding the work is also meant to remind viewers about the efforts of Métis leader Louis Riel "and the work we are yet to complete."

The painting features "the colours and patterns" of Mr. Akinbolaji's Nigerian roots, and is "really questioning whose identity is what," and "raises the kinds of questions that we all need to be asking ourselves and asking society," said Sen. Bovey.

Ms. Gibson, who's also an English professor at Simon Fraser University, started work on *Who's Who* in late 2013. From the dining table in her west-end Vancouver apartment, she said she spent a year punching holes in the 1927 book's pages, sewing close to 2,000 threads of black cotton through them (helped by two friends who measured and cut yarn), and finally tying, braiding, and twisting those threads into the sculpture that's now featured in the Senate foyer.

Long "fascinated by old books," Ms. Gibson said she stumbled upon *Who's Who in Canada*, 1927 in a used book store and everything about it, from "the title, the size, the iconic red cover, the gold print, the photos inside," inspired her project. Noting her and Mr. Akinbolaji's pieces—which she said "really complement each other"—are the

first by Black artists in the Senate, Ms. Gibson said she hopes they "won't be the last."

Sen. Bovey said she personally hopes to see more diverse displays, including more works by Indigenous artists, featured throughout the Senate's side of the precinct in the future.

"It is these installations that give voice within the Senate [of a] wider representation of Canadians," she said. "Now that the building is open and the move of the collection has [been] done, we can then turn to that part of our responsibility, which is increasing the knowledge and awareness of the connection between Canadians and the Senate itself."



Winnipeg-based artist Yisa Akinbolaji immigrated to Canada from Nigeria in 1997. Photograph courtesy of Abby Akinbolaji

Asked about plans for the next such display, Sen. Bovey said the working group has begun discussions, but flagged COVID-19 as a complication, as she finds it important to travel to meet artists and see their work in person.

The Senate's art advisory group dates to 2002. It's charged with deciding which artwork gets displayed in Senate committee rooms, other meeting spaces, and corridors, and helped oversee the removal, transportation, and storage of Senate art from the Centre Block building in 2018 and 2019.

Sen. Bovey confirmed the working group "will be very involved as spaces are developed" and final design plans settled on for Centre Block's massive renovation.

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