

Art installation honouring Viola Desmond unveiled in north end Halifax

By **Amber Fryday** Global News

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It was an afternoon filled with emotion and celebration for the community in north end Halifax, as a new art installation honouring Viola Desmond was unveiled.

People of all ages came to see the legacy art project on Gottingen Street on Wednesday.

Lead artist Marven Nelligan said the entire team that worked on the project was comprised of people and companies from the north end.

“I got my start here and it was a big milestone project for me because a lot of my projects are here in the community and around the neighbourhood,” Nelligan said.

Desmond, a businesswoman who owned a hair salon, was arrested while watching a movie at a New Glasgow, N.S., theatre in 1946. The theatre was segregated at that time, with Black patrons relegated to the balcony while floor seating was reserved for whites. Her case helped start the civil rights movement in Canada.

She was posthumously pardoned in 2010, inducted into Canada’s Walk of Fame in 2017 and a \$10 bill bearing her likeness was issued in November 2018. Desmond was the first Black person — and the first non-royal woman — on a regularly-circulating Canadian banknote.

The art collaboration between the Viola Desmond Legacy Committee and the North End Business Association is a replica of Desmond’s hair studio, with a modern-day twist.

The interactive installation is situated next to The Braiding Lounge, a studio focused on providing chemical-free services for natural-textured hair. It’s a full-circle moment for owner Tara Taylor, who said she pursued a career in hairstyling because of the influence Desmond had on her life.

“To be next to her story and her greatness is just such an honour. I’m not Viola and I never will be but I just want to embody what she meant to the Black woman business world,” said Taylor.

It was a sentiment echoed by others who commemorated Desmond at the unveiling.

“Through action, advocacy, aspiration and hope, because of a sister’s courage ... we now have a Black woman on a bank note,” said Guyleigh Johnson, a spoken word artist.

Nelligan said a virtual element will be added to the art installation next year, and hopefully the artwork will spark more conversation about Desmond and her legacy.

“People are starting to embrace and really become aware of her accomplishments more so than the incident that happened to her and that’s really what this project was,” said Nelligan.

— with files from The Canadian Press and Rebecca Lau

<https://globalnews.ca/news/9300985/viola-desmond-art-installation-halifax/#:~:text=The%20art%20collaboration%20between%20the,services%20for%20natural%2Dtextured%20hair.>