

How Viola Desmond's salon space has been reimagined through art

[Anam Khan](#) · CBC News · Posted: Nov 27, 2022 6:00 AM AT | Last Updated: November 27

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Those walking along Gottingen Street in Halifax can now step into an art space created to honour civil rights activist Viola Desmond.

The Viola Desmond Experience was created by artist Marven Nelligan and was unveiled last week.

It is part of the Viola Desmond Legacy Art Project committee, created a few years ago to commemorate Desmond's life before she became known for her activism.

Desmond, a Black beautician and businesswoman, was arrested in 1946 while watching a movie in the whites-only section of the theatre in New Glasgow, N.S.

The exhibit is located right between The Braiding Lounge and Blue Collar Barbershop. Onlookers are often seen stopping and taking photos.

The space has a large mirror on the wall facing the street. The floor has an adhesive covering that looks like wood.

The wall has a picture of Desmond looking on while women chat, get their hair washed, and read *The Clarion*, Nova Scotia's Black newspaper.

A dresser painted on the wall has a photo of Desmond and her sister, Wanda Robson, who championed her sister's legacy.

There is a salon chair in the middle of the exhibit. Visitors are welcome to take a seat.

"A lot of people don't really know the achievements of Viola Desmond and the things that she accomplished through her career long before she was a civil rights icon," said Nelligan.

Virtual experience in the works

He said the group is also working to add a [virtual component](#) to the exhibit. Participants will be able to scan a QR code and see a lookalike of Desmond behind them sharing her story.

"She was an entrepreneur, she was a businesswoman, she was a Black businesswoman, she made products, she was a manufacturer, she was an educator," said Tara Taylor, who owns The Braiding Lounge and is on the art project committee.

"So, she not only learned her craft, she taught her craft to other Black women in the community. And that's what we want people to remember her for."

Taylor said she was proud to see the space open right beside her business. Desmond's original salon was nearby.

"I'm extremely inspired by what she did in her community at the time," said Taylor.

"Back then she was pretty much considered almost a millionaire. And so I just want to embody all of the things that she meant to her community."

Taylor said the committee plans to share the virtual experience with New Glasgow.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/halifax-artist-creates-interactive-simulation-of-viola-desmond-s-salon-1.6665649>