

Nova Scotia

## 75 years after Viola Desmond's arrest, a north-end Halifax group seeks to honour her

North End Business Association announces it will commission a commemorative art piece



[Feleshia Chandler](#) · CBC News · Posted: Nov 08, 2021 5:36 PM AT | Last Updated: November 8



Viola Desmond was a civil rights pioneer. (CBC Archives)

It's been 75 years since businesswoman-turned social justice activist Viola Desmond was arrested at the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow, N.S., for challenging racial segregation by daring to sit in a "whites only" section.

To mark that anniversary, the North End Business Association in Halifax has announced a new commemorative art piece collaboration set to be completed in 2022.

"We've been working on it for the last year," said Bernadette Hamilton-Reid with the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition (ANSDPAD).

"It's very exciting to see this come to fruition as to how we can best commemorate Viola for her strong resiliency as a Black woman entrepreneur and setting the stage for many other generations to come after her."

ANSDPAD is part of the Viola Desmond Legacy Committee, which was established in 2018 in order to see Desmond, who died in 1965, recognized in Halifax, the city where she lived and where her actions in business and civil rights have a lasting impact.

The North End Business Association is collaborating with the committee to have an art piece built on Gottingen Street, near where Desmond's old hairdressing shop used to be.

## **Artists from across the province**

Tracy Jackson, the executive director of the North End Business Association, said the budget for the project is about \$159,000.

"It can be challenging because what we are looking for is a large installation and something that can be outdoors all seasons that can last, you know, a long time," Jackson said

Jackson said they're hoping to garner interest from artists across the province.

"What we are hoping for is that there is a Nova Scotian artist, even better an African Nova Scotian artist or a team of people that will come up with something and do something that is not only going to be reflective of all that, but also I think we're looking for something that can be unique."



It has been 75 years since Viola Desmond was arrested for refusing to leave the whites only section of the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow. Amy Smith spoke to Lindsay Ruck of the Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute about the significance of Viola Desmond. 4:20

Jackson said a new Black-owned business called the Braiding Lounge Salon is set to open right next to where the installation will be located.

Hamilton-Reid said the installation could be anything, and they're open to creative submissions.

"It could be anything from a hairdresser's chair ... a full-size figure Viola pretending to be doing their hair," Hamilton-Reid. "You look at some things in Toronto, in Ottawa, at the different sites that people have already done sculptures for."

Hamilton-Reid said they expect to have the art piece done by spring.

## **Dartmouth celebrates Desmond's 75th anniversary**

Recently, the Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission collaborated with a local hair stylist to honour Desmond's 75th anniversary with an art piece displayed in the window of 144 Portland St.

For the month of November, they're displaying a piece of art by Samantha Dixon, with three panels about the history of Black people in the province, hair care and how it pertains to Desmond's legacy. It also talks about the future of Black hair care.

"I'm hoping that they [people walking by] learn something. Learn a little bit more about Viola Desmond. Learn a little bit more about the Black community here in Nova Scotia and some of the struggles that they've faced," said Tim Rissesco, the commission's executive director.

Rissesco said Dixon plans on displaying the framed panel art piece in other places and reach other communities.

Jackson said an official submission form for the Gottingen project will be circulating soon, and they also expect to hold a community engagement session later this month to discuss the community's thoughts on the commemorative art piece.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/association-business-viola-desmond-anniversary-75-1.6241070>