



VETERANS' HOUSE

A Multifaith Housing Initiative Community

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Red Blanket Project exhibit at Preston Square features stunning portraits of Canadian veterans

PTSD awareness initiative to support Veterans' House: the Andy Carswell Building in Ottawa

OTTAWA | Ottawa residents looking for a unique way to reflect on Veterans' Week 2021 may wish to drop by Preston Square, and visit a local artist's exhibit honouring veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Red Blanket Project: A Journey into Healing & PTSD in Veterans and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces is on display at the Ottawa School of Art's exhibit space (347 Preston Street, second floor). There is no entrance fee to view the exhibit. It features nineteen paintings and drawings featuring portraits of military men and women by Ottawa artist Mahshid Farhoudi, as well as two paintings by Chelsea-area artist and veteran Robert Bradley, who uses art as a healing tool for his own PTSD.

The Red Blanket Project is the result of over a year of work. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Farhoudi conversed with portrait subjects via telephone and over Zoom, sharing and exploring their experiences with PTSD.

"The work I have done is a way of creating support to the veterans and active members living with PTSD in their healing journey," said Mahshid. "Art is a way of creating hope. And a way of providing awareness in order to destigmatize issues surrounding PTSD. PTSD is not who they are; rather, what has happened to them. Exploring and documenting their stories through visual means of drawing and painting is a way to contribute to their healing journey, in addition to creating awareness of their plight in our communities."

All of Farhoudi and Bradley's subjects are draped in a symbolic red blanket.

"The Red Blanket Project has many meanings," explained Farhoudi. "The idea of the red blanket itself is to give comfort. Red is a colour of passion and perseverance; red is also a colour of courage and resilience."

She also noted red is the official colour of Veterans' House: the Andy Carswell Building, a 40-



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unit home for veterans who have experienced homelessness and/or housing precarity. The Andy Carswell Building, owned and operated by Ottawa affordable charity Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI), opened its doors in January 2021. Twenty-five percent of any sales of the Red Blanket Project pieces will support programming at house.

“The art pieces featured in the project are beautiful and compelling, and we’re honoured that Mahshid and Robert decided to spotlight PTSD and support Veterans’ House,” said MHI Executive Director Suzanne Le. She noted that Farhoudi and MHI staff are currently on the hunt for one (or more) locations that can host the Red Blanket Project after its stay at Preston Square ends on January 14, 2022.

“Our fingers are crossed that another venue will step forward,” explained Le. “The next location doesn’t have to be a formal art gallery, by any means.” She noted that the next site will need sufficient space for the artwork and wifi access for visitors. MHI staff are in the midst of preparing an internet-based audio tour for the Red Blanket Project featuring interviews with some of the featured veterans in the portraits.

VISIT THE RED BLANKET PROJECT

You can visit the exhibit Monday through Friday, 6 am to 6 pm, at the second floor of Preston Square, 347 Preston Street in Ottawa. Weekend visits can be arranged by appointment by emailing boutique@artottawa.ca.

For media inquiries, more information, or to suggest a space for the Red Blanket Project, please visit multifaithhousing.ca/redblanketproject, email communications@multifaithhousing.ca, or call MHI at 613-686-1825.



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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Mahshid Farhoudi – Mahshid Farhoudi is an Iranian-born Canadian artist. In her work she addresses issues of identity and belonging through an exploration of the presence of duality within our personalities. This duality is distinguished by the invariable interdependence of light and shadow, within which the former may be perceived as beauty and the latter a pervasive terror.

Mahshid's approach to artmaking is influenced by traditional methods evident in the appropriation of gold and charcoal in her various works. She is primarily drawn to individual journeys and personal stories. The artist's initial foray into art started at the age of 14 after being admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts in Tehran, Iran. Following the completion of two years with the school, due to the socio-political situation brought about by the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, she fled Iran and arrived in Canada as a refugee without her parents.

She attended Canterbury Arts High School in Ottawa and later enrolled in York University as an undergraduate student in visual arts. Halfway through postsecondary studies, Mahshid switched gears and became a student at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCADU) in Toronto. The degree included an off-campus study abroad year in Florence, Italy that proved to be formative in the artist's development. Mahshid graduated with honours from OCAD, but returned to Italy following a year-long interregnum, and worked in Florence as a local assistant to OCAD's off campus program for two years. Simultaneously, she joined Charles Cecil's Studio in the city to learn naturalistic approaches to art.

Mahshid came back to Canada in 2002 and started a pedagogical career teaching figurative and portrait drawing in the General Interests program at the Ottawa School of Art. She also designed several quintessential courses of the schools' Diploma program pertaining to the fundamentals of drawing, materials, and techniques. Outside her role as an educator, Mahshid continues to pursue her passion for crafting representational drawings and paintings. Each work provides a renewed opportunity for the artist to delve into the search for that ubiquitous, unwavering, and graceful gesture entrenched in the very heart of humanity and the human condition.

Robert Bradley – Born in Newfoundland, Robert completed his Fine Arts Diploma with the Ottawa School of Art on the heels of a 28-year career with the Royal Canadian Engineers, during which he served many months deployed abroad in a variety of operations. Sculpting mainly in



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clay, wood, metals and stone, Robert explores these various media as a medium for the artistic expression and cathartic transposition of his lived experiences.

Large paintings of animals and depictions of past military experiences comprise an integral component of his artistic approach to therapeutic reconciliation with a quarter-century's worth of tumultuous memories. Carving out a physical space dedicated to enshrining his inner search for self-rediscovery, Robert built and established an art studio in the tranquil town of Chelsea, Quebec.