

## **Maisa Mreiwed**

*The Rag-and-bone Man/ Le Chiffonnier*

2018

Hand-painted with quill, ink, and acrylics, on muslin Fabric

31" x 39.5"

Montréal, Québec, Canada

*The Rag-and-bone Man/Le Chiffonnier*, is an artwork that tells the story of rag pickers who transcend time and place as they travel on foot and later on horse-drawn wagons (in the 19th century) to gather unwanted household items that include rags, bones and different metals. With their collected items in their small bags and the countless stories that they have gathered throughout their journeys, they attempt to sell them to merchants and others who are interested. In this piece, the wagon wheel symbolizes a rag picker's journey to share the stories of these items and to show that everything can be reused – items that are perceived as trash or simply rags are not. There are infinite possibilities; one just has to use his/her/their imagination.

I decided to re-tell the story of rag pickers as I think that it is an important one to tell. Innovative ways of recycling and pioneers in this field have been around for centuries, but not all have received the credit that they deserve. Our history books need to be filled with heroes in different fields in order to show that great work and change can be done in any field.

Since I wanted to position my artwork within a specific narrative, and I was not able to trace the rag pickers to a specific time, I decided to focus on the symbolic aspect of the story. Hence, I used the wagon wheel to signify the rag picker's journey. I felt that the wheel - the circle (which is a universal and infinite sign) - would be a befitting symbol of the rag pickers for several reasons: 1) this profession was inclusive - done by men, women and children; hence, we should not limit it by depicting one gender; 2) there were and still are "rag pickers" all over the world (although the name has changed, the main concept is still that same); 3) the wheel also denotes the changes in transportation of these items from foot, then to wagon, trains and today with cars, bikes and busses; and, four their stories are timeless.

The narratives and lessons that can come out of re-telling the story of rag pickers can be powerful. As a society we are still struggling to overcome over-consumption and pollution. These narratives can serve as reminders that change even positive change is not always accepted, but with conviction, it can make a difference and create a positive trend. Through recycling and reusing, we can tell stories and help the environment.