



Avy Loftus

Batik for the Next Generation

Avy Loftus, a Montreal based interdisciplinary artist explores the world through a variety of mediums such as textiles, drawings, oils, and watercolours, adding a unique perspective with her Indonesian, Mongolian and Dutch heritage. This mixed heritage made her an easy target for bullying when she attended school in Jakarta, Indonesia. Her parents encouraged her towards a science career, but she soon made up her mind that the visual arts and art education was more fitting. Avy received a Bachelor of Art degree in Language & Art and Education at Atama Jaya Catholic University in Jakarta. After moving to Montreal from Jakarta she studied at the Saide Bronfman Center School of Fine Arts (1) where she received a Diploma in Fine Arts. Most recently, in 2020, Avy completed her master's degree in art education from Concordia University. Whether she is working from her home studio

or her space at the Montreal Art Center, her works create a sense of togetherness by instilling positive values and translating experiences across space and time.

In 2007, her only daughter was bullied at school. Avy sought to find solutions to this problem by hosting a batik workshop for her class. She watched and observed the positive impact that this project had on these children. Random acts of kindness and peace were themes they explored together through classroom discussions. She sewed students' individual batik pieces into a quilt, and in 2008 exhibited it at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts for the first time. Overwhelmed with requests for her workshop from different schools, the Peace, Love, and Hope project was born. Avy works with children across Quebec to educate schools about violence and bullying and to promote peace and friendship. Since then, Avy has exhibited

the Peace, Love and Hope batik quilt in different cities in the US, Ireland, Japan and Indonesia. The Peace, Love and Hope project will continue until it reaches one million children around the world. Over the last 15 years, it has reached more than 250,000 children.

Partly from fond memories of her grandmother's extensive batik collection, Avy returned to Indonesia in 2003 and then in 2009 to learn more about batik's history and to perfect her techniques. Batik is a traditional Asian textile art using wax-resist dyeing technique to colour textiles, allowing dyes to be layered on top of each other while shielding certain areas with wax. The wax is applied with a canting tool (2) that creates beautiful designs and tiny details. One of Avy's favourite pieces titled Mother Nature I is twenty-five years in the making and is still unfinished. The center of the piece features intercon-

nected butterflies that form the shape of a pond where goldfish swim in bright blue water. The fabric surrounding the pond has layers of unique colourful patterns ranging from tiny, detailed pointillism to big abstract colour patches. The vertical edges of this piece feature more intricate butterflies and floral patterns. When looking at this piece, I can feel a true connection to nature. The white parts have yet to bloom in full colour, and Mother Nature I truly emulates Avy's ever-evolving journey as an artist.

By sharing her traditional batik practices with children, Avy encourages students into a dialogue about anti-violence, discrimination and mental health. Peace and mutual respect amongst the next generation is the goal of this important work. It has also been a healing journey for Avy because of the hurt she experienced in her early childhood of being bullied in school. As a young adult who is

also a person of colour, I see the need for such programs and the importance of dialogue about racial discrimination in schools. Avy hopes the project educates and creates awareness for children of colour, and in so doing reduces loneliness, uncertainty, and low self-esteem.

Ethnicity and our interconnectedness are such misunderstood parts of our society. Currently, Avy has undertaken the production of graphite portrait drawings of children of mixed heritage. This comes from a realization that some children were starting to reject their heritage due to discrimination, or a lack of inclusion and representation. B&W portraits blur the lines of race and ethnicity and it also makes us united, as one race – the human race. Her plan is to eventually evolve this project from paper to fabric to create a large-scale quilt by applying batik and silk screen process.

“Art allows us to transcend language barriers and speak our feeling and emotions.”

As an established artist and educator for the past twenty-five years in Montreal, Avy has earned much respect and recognition for her work. Her workshops at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts for adults and seniors as well as her work have created positive exchanges within Montreal's art community. She is one of the founding members of Accès Asie, an organization that aims to promote Asian art and culture. She was the recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee award in 2013 along with countless grants and recognitions. Avy reminds young artists of the importance of being truly and uniquely yourself and to always create from the heart. Her work is an inspiration to all, and her influence is bound to resonate with many generations to come.

Based on an interview with Ayshani Aurora

References

1. Schwartz, S. (2016, October 7). Saidye Bronfman School of Fine Arts Reunion: 9 1/2 years after its ... Saidye Bronfman School of Fine Arts reunion: 9 1/2 years after its closure, seven former teachers hold joint exhibition. <https://montrealgazette.com/entertainment/local-arts/saidye-bronfman-school-of-fine-arts-reunion-9-12-years-after-its-closure-seven-former-teachers-hold-joint-exhibition/> This institute was a lively hub of learning and creativity where professional artists dedicated themselves to teaching their eager students. Sadly, in 2006 the center closed its doors, and it is now known as the Segal Center for Performing Arts.
2. Wikimedia Foundation. (2023, May 10). Canting. Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canting> A traditional Batik tool that is used to apply wax onto textiles. It is usually made with a bamboo handle that has a copper wax- container and spout. Modern day tools might be made with alternate metals.

