

# *The Never-Ending Quest for Inclusion*

By Edward Milo Johnson



Threads Through Time, Artist Dennis K. Smith

The Artists of Colour exhibit "*The Never-Ending Quest For Inclusion*" made a successful, impressive, and inspiring debut at Mackenzie Hall Cultural Centre in Windsor. The fine arts-based display is the second portion of the "Journeys" project developed by the Not-For-Profit Collective of twelve, which includes fine artists, authors, musicians, historians, and actors.

As director of the endeavour, Dennis K. Smith used his outstanding creative talents to develop and display a combination of art and Black Canadian History in telling a most compelling story of the strength, determination and resilience Black Canadians displayed in achieving success. Sections of the exhibit included all of Canada, but focused on local contributions and accomplishments of Black citizens of Upper Canada, specifically Essex and Kent Counties.

The show included a gallery of over thirty-seven fine art pieces by The Artists of Colour and thirty-five images and artifacts depicting Canadian Black historical figures and events. The fine art pieces depicted the talents, challenges, dreams, achievements, and heartaches of Black Canadians. Dennis Smith's 'The Capture of The Schooner Anne' illuminated the daring capture of the Schooner Anne by the Fort Malden Militia and the Colchester Black Militia. Other creations by artists illustrated local Black Canadians who achieved greatness, such as Carol Parris' 'Portia White,' Wanda Relf's multi-media 'Hattie Mae Rhue,' and Dennis Smith's 'Elijah McCoy' and 'Delos Davis.' Manzella Vincent's majestic sculpture of Mary Ann Shadd was a golden delight. A large wall painting, 'Threads Through Time' by Dennis Smith and Lois Larkin's, 'Walker House' emphasized the positive

Black presence of leaders in Windsor. Other paintings such as Lana Talbot's, 'Thornton and Lucie Blackburn,' Susan Johnson-Washington's, 'Matthew Elliott's Farm' and Connie Lee-Turner's, 'Clandestine Journey' beckoned guests to envision escapes to freedom. The exhibit was captured extensively by TAOC photographer, Nicole Talbot.

Eight descriptive historical panels created by Dennis Smith, Milo Johnson, and Nicole Talbot led patrons on a guided journey through Black Canadian history and revealed much material not included in Canadian annals. The information presented was accompanied by seventy QRs that immersed the viewer in historical accounts, descriptions, and videos.

Visitors and students were greeted by reenactments of Black historical figures by TAOC members Milo Johnson as John "Daddy" Hall, The Town Cryer of Owen Sound, Stacey Griffith as Black Pullman Railroad Porter Hilliard Morris, and Jim Walls as 1837-38 Upper Canada Rebellion soldier Richard Pierpoint. The actors' renditions of events brought history to life and allowed viewers to experience

"actual" events.

The Artists of Colour committee members, Susan Johnson-Washington, Lana Talbot, Dennis K. Smith, Connie Lee-Turner, Stacey Griffith, Jim Walls, Milo Johnson, Carol Parris, Lois Larkin, Wanda Relf, Manzella Vincent, and Nicole Talbot greeted visitors and gave guided tours of the exhibition. A host of volunteers assisted in the setup and the management of the show.

The collective earned media attention as The Artists of Colour committee members were interviewed by Gary Archibald of CTV News and Josiah Sinasan of CBC morning news.

The "*Never-Ending Quest for Inclusion*" project was funded by the City of Windsor's Arts, Culture & Heritage Fund Program.

The Artists of Colours annual spring art show "*The Stories We Tell 2024*" will take place at Mackenzie Hall from Friday, April 26th to Sunday, May 5th featuring artists from Windsor-Essex, London, and Michigan.

<http://www.theartistsofcolour.com>

