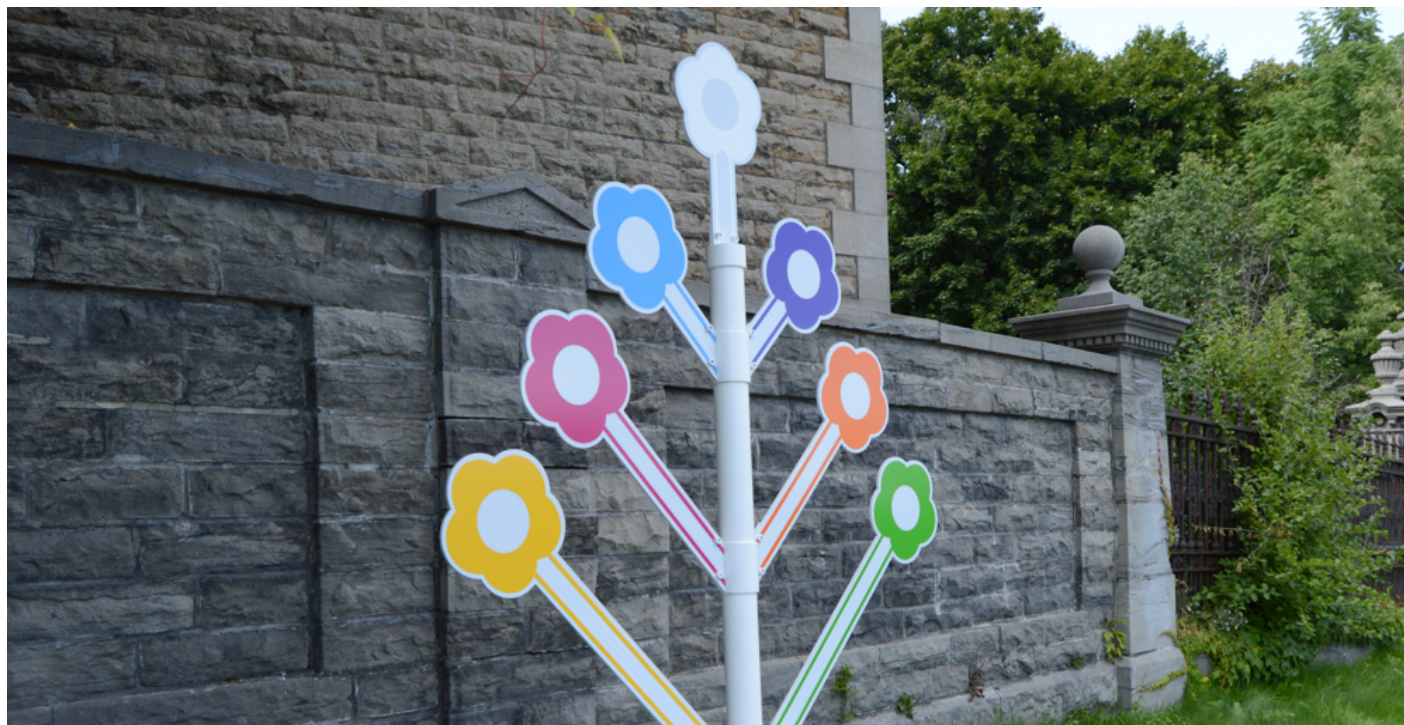


ARTS

The Celestial Tree Inspires Visions Of Collective Action

BY **CHLOË LALONDE** · SEPTEMBER 5, 2017 · ⌚ 4 MINUTE READ



The Concordian



Concordia alumna, Skawennati, uses her piece, The Celestial Tree, to inspire visions of collective action. Photo by Mackenzie Lad.

Walk along the Promenade Fleuve-Montagne as Montreal's history unfolds in Path of Resilience

Telling a story of transcendence, *Path of Resilience* presents three works spread out along the new Promenade Fleuve-Montagne created by Indigenous artists Maria Hupfield, Nadia Myre, and Concordia's own BFA design graduate, Skawennati.

Commissioned by DHC/ART's managing director and curator, Cheryl Sim, and established for Montreal's 375th anniversary, the Promenade Fleuve-Montagne allows pedestrians to discover the city's historical landmarks and public artworks.

Hupfield's piece, *Ka Pow !*, can be found directly outside of the Square Victoria metro station, catching the attention of passersby. Inspired by comic book art, Hupfield arranged white cedar benches into action bubbles around a tree.



Maria Hupfield starts off the Path of Resilience with *Ka Pow !*, an interactive sculpture aiming to unite passersby and inspire dialogue. Photo by Chloë Lalonde.

A few blocks further along the promenade, Myre's piece illuminates the trees behind the St-Patrick Basilica with a string of fairy lights. The space is inviting. Wooden chairs are grouped together to form a strong sense of community, while the heart-wrenching story of Marie-Joseph Angélique, a young black slave who was tried and convicted for arson based on a widespread rumour in the 18th century, is narrated from a sound system in the trees. The piece, titled *Histoire Revenue*, reminds us of Montreal's past injustices, forcing us to be aware of all the anguish held within this land.

Skawennati's piece is much further along the path, sitting in front of the Royal Victoria Hospital at the corner of Pine Avenue West and McTavish Street. *The Celestial Tree* is at the highest altitude of the Promenade Fleuve-Montagne. "I wanted to take the image of *She Falls for Ages*—which is the central

image of Skyworld, a very important image in Iroquois cosmology and Iroquois traditional stories—and put it in the city, using materials and processes that are [as] recognisable as the city,” the artist said.

The body of the tree is a large stop sign post, and it’s branches are thick pieces of metal coated in reflective paneling.

The installation refers to the Concordia alumna’s upcoming machinima (a new media production), *She Falls for Ages*. As a way of opposing modern animation aesthetics, Skawennati chose to work with *Second Life*. Similar to *Sims*, the platform allows for immense creative freedom under some technical limitation. This approach is entirely specific to the artist’s body of work. When she began using the platform in 2007, *Second Life*, a “massively multiplayer online world” otherwise known as a virtual environment, really represented the future of modern social interaction. To be released in October 2017, *She Falls for Ages* will be a feminist, futuristic, utopian retelling of the First Nations’s creation story.

Today, many Indigenous stories are not known by their own people. Skawennati said she believes everyone should be familiar with them, as these stories are the foundation of the city of Montreal. The story of Skyworld, otherwise known as the First Nations’s creation story, adds a dimension to the Iroquois people and heritage that is not widely known, she explained. The Iroquois are often seen as warriors, fighters and troublemakers, and in Skawennati’s words, **“knowing the creation story allows you to understand that it’s all about peace and love for creation”**.

The six bright colours of the flowers depicted on *The Celestial Tree* match the skin tones of the citizens of Skawennati’s Skyworld. By using these colours, she said she wants to call all people, no matter their race, to seek awareness and fight for a brighter, inclusive future. Skawennati strives to inspire collective action, providing various visions of what could be, while on her own path of learning more about her Mohawk heritage.

In the most common version of their story, the people of Skyworld live quietly and happily, knowing nothing of death and inequality. Instead, their day-to-day lives revolve around the maintenance of the Celestial Tree. The tree sits inside a hole to the universe, and provides light to all the land, according to the myth.

In the original story, one of the sky women realises she is pregnant. Her husband, the guardian of the Celestial Tree, becomes so angry that he rips the tree from its roots, revealing the massive hole in the universe. Curious, Sky Woman, peers into the hole and her husband pushes her in.

In *She Falls for Ages*, the Celestial Tree grows weak, and the people of Skyworld know that their time is coming to an end. The Celestial Tree guardian’s wife, here named Otsitsakáion, volunteers to jump into the abyss with child and serve as the seed of the new world.

In all versions of the story, Sky Woman “falls for ages,” eventually landing on the backs of geese, who place her on the back of a turtle. At this time, the Earth was simply water, devoid of land, and Sky Woman

makes it her duty to create it. With the help of small animals, she was eventually able to grow shrubbery. As time passed, Turtle Island grew from a small mound of dirt on a turtle's back, into what we now know as North America.

On display until Nov. 30, *Path of Resilience* tells a story of transcendence. The installations start by gathering people of all kinds together, encouraging them to acknowledge the history of the place in which they live—a necessary process in moving towards a unified future.

- arts
- installation
- Path of Resilience
- Skawennati
- The Celestial Tree
- The Concordian



Share

Tweet



Author

Chloë Lalonde



< Previous Article



The Line Between Incautious Confidence And Paranoia

BY AMANDA KATHERINE



Next Article

Two Stingers Proudly Represented Concordia At Hockey Canada Development Camp

BY NICHOLAS DI GIOVANNI




ABC POUR LES ARTISTES VISUELS
Art Business Corrélation

Programme de 5 cours de 2h30 par semaine en présentiel à la galerie d'Art. Pour réserver votre place, contactez-nous dès maintenant. Les places sont limitées ! Possibilité d'exposer à la galerie.

- Investir pour grandir en Arts visuels
- Développer votre Art et en vivre
- Franchir les étapes pour être en affaires
- Comprendre un contrat d'artiste
- Choisir une galerie qui vous ressemble

ABC FOR VISUAL ARTISTS

A 5-week program, 2.5 hours per week at the gallery. Please contact us to reserve and guarantee your seat. Limited places ! Possibility to show your art.

- Invest to grow in visual arts
- Develop your Art into a business
- Become an active professional artist
- Choose a gallery that suits you
- Understand an artist contract



Isabelle Charbonneau | Carré des Artistes Galerie d'Art
1850 Notre-Dame O. Montreal Qc H3J 1M5

Pour plus d'informations :

-  514-566-9205
-  www.carredesartistes.com
-  isabelle@carredesartistes.com

Open house job fair May 9th from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. 3 Place Ville Marie #200 RSVP NOW AT sekuemerchants.com/jobfair 

USEFUL FORMS

- **Anonymous News Tips**
- **Submit a Classified**
- **Letters to the Editor**
- **Become a Contributor**
- **Corrections**

Instagram

Twitter Feed

Related Posts

ARTS**Cabaret**

The First Class Theatre launches its 2005-2006 season with the revival of one of the most beloved musicals of all time. A bold decision, but one that clearly sets the stage for a promising new season. It has been almost 40 years since Cabaret debuted on Broadway.

BY **ARCHIVES**

ARTS**The United States: Keeping A Close Eye On Freedom**

Directors believe that a great documentary film opens up conversation and does not answer all the questions, in hopes that audiences will become informed rather than regurgitate information they've seen in point-of-view filmmaking. Michael Moore does not have very many friends at the Septi

BY **ARCHIVES**



ARTS

Power Rangers: A Nostalgic Film Without The Original’s Charm

The first Power Rangers film in 20 years takes itself too seriously Over the past few years, nostalgia...

BY **ROMINA FLORENCIA ARRIETA**



ARTS

Tom Hardy’s “Venom” Lacks Bite

Despite bad screenplay, Tom Hardy is the perfect Eddie Brock Venom, the first spin-off in Sony’s Spider-Man universe...

BY **JASON LAM**

ARTS

Capturing The Raw Beauty In Everyday People And Places

BY **CHLOË LALONDE** · SEPTEMBER 12, 2017 · ⌚ 3 MINUTE READ

Figure 3: Hassan II Mosque across the water from Paloma Beach in Mohammedia, Morocco.

New to Concordia's photography program, artist ASVJAD is inspired by a recent trip to Morocco

Working mainly off of his Instagram account, ASVJAD strives to capture raw beauty in everything and everyone around him. Born in the Bay Area of California and, as he put it, "molded" in Montreal, the Concordia artist discovered his passion while conducting freelance shoots of his classmates and capturing candids for the Fine Arts Core Education High School yearbook in 2013.

ASVJAD explained that he started out using a small second-hand digital camera. The more he photographed, the better he got, learning more about his own style along the way. The artist said he aspires to produce works as eye-catching and provocative as Terry Richardson's and as timeless as Robert Mapplethorpe's. These inspirations can be seen in his portraits, which have an incredible dramatic edge, both in black and white and in colour.

ASVJAD photographed by his mother in Morocco.

ASVJAD is also inspired by old black-and-white foreign films and the work of Sally Mann (particularly *Candy Cigarette* circa 1989). He prefers to use subtle props to pack a punch, a choice that is influenced by Ren Hang's modern and eclectic photographs.

As a freelance artist, he enjoys collaborating with other freelancers because it enables him to work without the creative restraints that may come with working for an agency.

In his work, ASVJAD focuses on empowerment, sexuality and the body. He said he looks for a unique, structural appearance, a fresh face and a distinct energy. When organising a photoshoot, ASVJAD will

often take the time to get to know his models and go over styling (clothing, hair and makeup) options long before the day of the shoot.

Utilizing his background as a fashion stylist, ASVJAD will even help former clients shop for upcoming events. "I always had a love for fashion—I think it comes from my mother. From a very young age, she and my aunt would make their own clothes," he explained.

ASVJAD often asks his subjects to think back to a time when they were sad or angry, as he likes to play with emotions in his work, specifically surrounding the past. This creative process allows the artist to enhance aspects of his clients' personality, mood and overall aesthetic.

During a recent trip to Morocco, the artist spent much of his time photographing everyday Moroccan lifestyle.

Paco photographed by ASVJAD for a new series on the LGBTQ+ community in Morocco.

His goal was to capture members of the LGBTQ+ community, an extremely oppressed group in Morocco because of the country's strict laws against same-sex relationships. Since he was dealing with such taboo subject matter, he said reaching members of the community proved to be rather difficult.

This series of photographs remains incomplete, due to the fact that only two individuals were willing to have their pictures taken. ASVJAD was able to get in touch with Paco (the model in figure. 2) only after contacting him through social media. ASVJAD said he is planning on adding to the series throughout the upcoming year. **"Every single person has something to offer, no matter their skin colour, race or sexual orientation," the artist added.**

One of his photographs (figure. 3) was taken on 35mm film. It outlines the Hassan II Mosque across the water from Paloma Beach in Mohammedia, Morocco. Having visited his home country a mere three times, ASVJAD grew up seeing the pristine landmarks, tourist attractions and stunning Moroccan imagery only through photographs. In order to record a raw, Moroccan reality, he attempted to understand the country with the same energy and attention that he gives to his models, the artist explained. ASVJAD photographed the flea markets and the outskirts of Casablanca, as seen in one image (figure. 4), which shows a man praying in the streets.

The artist said he has “always appreciated the fact that photography can freeze a moment in time that can never be completely recreated.” ASVJAD shows his love for spontaneous moments and quick glimpses into the psyche when it comes to retouching his work. He only ever makes changes to the colouring, sharpness of his photographs and editing their overall appearance when the subject requests it.

ASVJAD is now enrolled in Concordia’s undergraduate photography program. He said he is looking forward to exploring technical lighting, working in studio spaces, developing film in darkrooms and being surrounded by creative people of all disciplines. The artist said he hopes his work will grow and evolve from the constructive criticism of his peers in a new, structured environment.

Photos by ASVJAD

[ASVJAD](#)[concordia](#)[photography](#)[profile](#)[student](#)[The Concordian](#)

Author