



Photos | Hiba Siddiqui

## KENT MONKMAN’S ARTWORK STUNS AT UOFT ART CENTRE

With Canada turning 150 this year, there are many projects underway to celebrate the uniqueness of our country, while also remembering the histories that have shaped it. *Shame and Prejudice: a Story of Resilience*; Indigenous artist Kent Monkman takes us on a journey through Canada’s history, beginning one hundred years before confederation. His artwork sheds light on the dark realities of Canada’s relationship with Indigenous people throughout history, by referencing classical European art styles to recount these Indigenous experiences. The exhibition was produced by the Art Museum at the University of Toronto, in partnership with the Confederation Centre Art Gallery, and ran from January 26th to March 4th.

Kent Monkman’s powerful paintings and artistic arrangements take us back to the 19th century and narrate, with passion, the incarceration and genocide of Indigenous people and culture. Rarely, if any, have there been a series of historically-based paintings that conveyed or accredited Indigenous experience into the canon of art history. This was instantly apparent walking into Kent Monkman’s exhibition. There was an incredible ambiance and emotion that I, personally, have never felt at an exhibition before. The vibrant colours, bold images, and intricate structures illustrated empathy, grief, passion, power, and strength. It was a tapestry of emotions, elicited through art, that both engaged you in their specific content, and connected to the present.

The notion of resilience was undoubtedly present in Monkman’s visual storytelling of Indigenous people. It is incredible to see how art can depict and describe histories that are often censored from public debate and overshadowed by more

dominant narratives. The exhibit was a powerful reminder as to whose land we live on and of the importance of remembering our country’s challenging past. As Canadians celebrate the big 150 and reflect on the progress we’ve made, we need to be cognizant of our dark history and treatment of the Indigenous peoples of Canada; the legacy of residential schools, deep socioeconomic inequalities, violence, urban disenfranchisement, and poverty. Especially during our current global-political environment, it is crucial that we strive to maintain harmony and respect between all Canadians.



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