

HOW WOULD YOU DRAW **CANADIAN IDENTITY?**

New temporary exhibit *Canada's Self Portrait* opens at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21

Exhibit preview: Thursday, June 30, 6pm
Special live art event: Friday, July 1, 10am
Meet the artist: Sunday, July 3, 10am-1pm
Final day of exhibition: Tuesday, July 12

1055 Marginal Rd, Halifax, NS B3H 4P7
Project website: aquil.ca/canada
 Photo credits: AlexTranPhotography.com

Sketch what it means to be Canadian. That's the challenge that artist Aquil Virani and cofounder Rebecca Jones gave to over 800 project participants from across Canada on their 2014 coast-to-coast trip. Whether positive or negative, stereotypical or profound, Virani spent more than 200 hours stylizing every single doodle into a unified-yet-varied representation of Canadian identity. As the winner of the **2016 Applied Arts Conceptual Illustration award**, this artwork now headlines the new temporary exhibit, *Canada's Self Portrait*, at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax.

"Our goal was to deepen the conversations about what we stand for as Canadians," Virani explains, "while spreading the simple joy of drawing." The 20-minute documentary, funded by an *Indiegogo* campaign, takes viewers on the entire journey across Canada from conception to reality with an optimistic conclusion about Canada's future. "Our identity is not just about who we are, but also who we want to be. We can acknowledge our troubled past, accept our imperfect reality and move forward with our collective goals and shared values in mind."

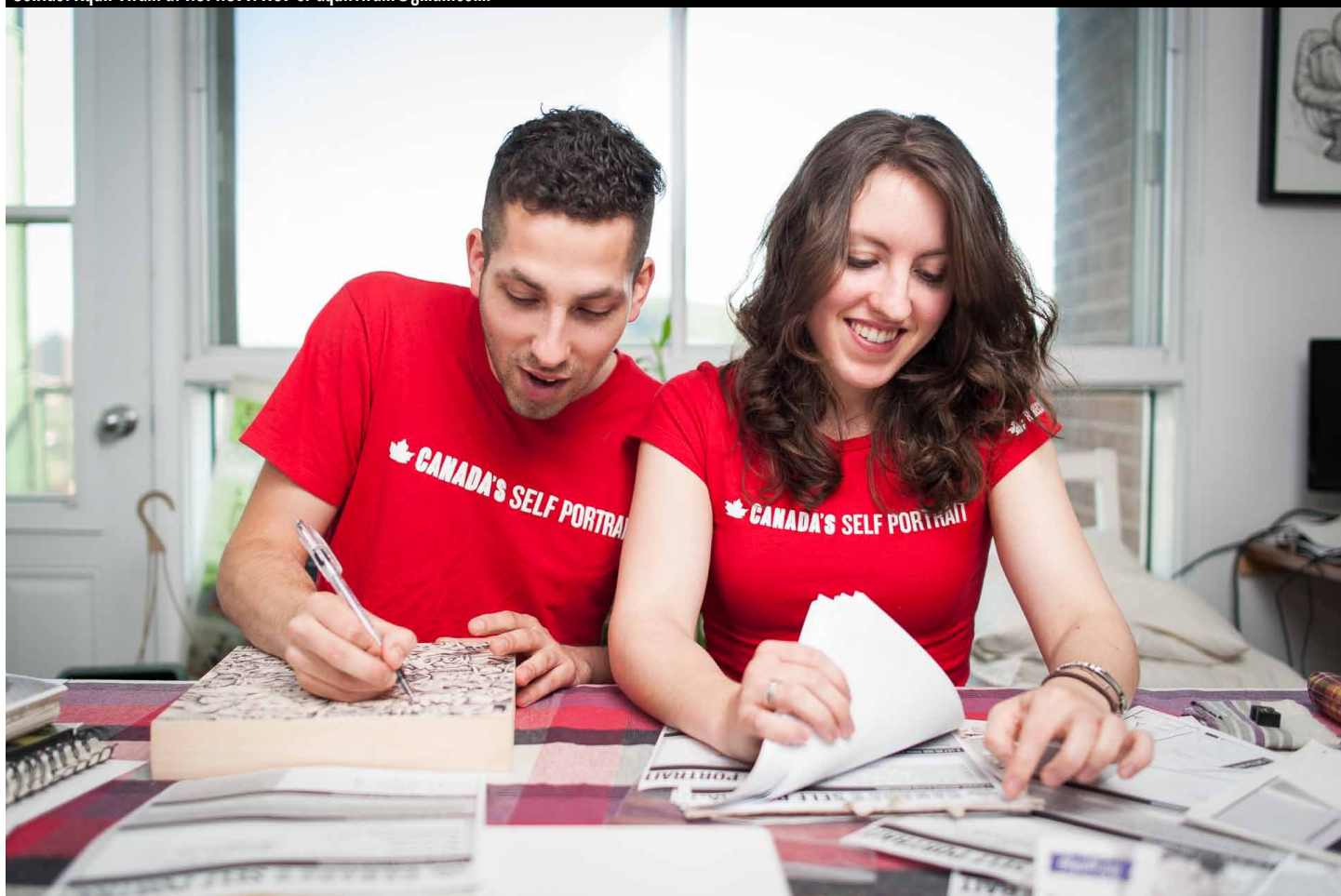
The final presentation of *Canada's Self Portrait* includes the main artwork, selected participant submissions, photographs from the coast-to-coast trip, and supplementary drawings and paintings, in addition to a short documentary film. *It's a rich exploration of all that Canada has to offer.*

See videos of the artist's work at:



Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21
 Musée canadien de l'immigration du Quai 21





AQUIL VIRANI

VISUAL ARTIST

Aquil Virani is a visual artist and graphic designer based in Montreal. He has been called “the people’s artist” because of his emphasis on accessible art practices; he often creates live, participatory artworks that directly integrate public contributions. His creative projects have taken him to cities throughout the world (New York, London, Punta Cana, Toronto, Boston, Ottawa, Montreal), having been featured consistently by the CBC, Global News, CTV, NPR, La Presse, Breakfast Television, and many other media platforms. It is Virani’s diverse upbringing that informs his focus on inclusion and social issues. He was born in Vancouver to a Catholic mother from France and an Ismaili Muslim father of Indian descent. He believes that we are all artists at heart and that we can all experience the joy he feels when creating. Aquil Virani is driven by a desire to communicate important ideas in an accessible and engaging way.

[Click here to watch a video at \[aquil.ca\]\(http://aquil.ca\)](#)



REBECCA JONES

PROJECT MANAGER

Rebecca Jones (b. 1990, Victoria, BC, Canada) is currently studying at McGill University’s Faculty of Law; her research interests include systemic discrimination, equality rights, and feminist legal theory. As a bilingual diversity educator, she led the Anglophone school operations of a Montreal-based non-profit called *ENSEMBLE pour le respect de la diversité*. She completed her BA&Sc in psychology and international development at McGill University, discovering a passion for global health, human rights and youth education. In 2012, Rebecca worked at a mobile medical clinic in Peru and later interviewed farmers in India for a sustainable development project. She now devotes her time to local community organisations with extensive experience developing and facilitating workshops on sexual health and human rights. She also enjoys performing in musical theatre productions and teaching Zumba.

Contact Aquil Virani at 1.514.677.4137 or aquilvirani@gmail.com.



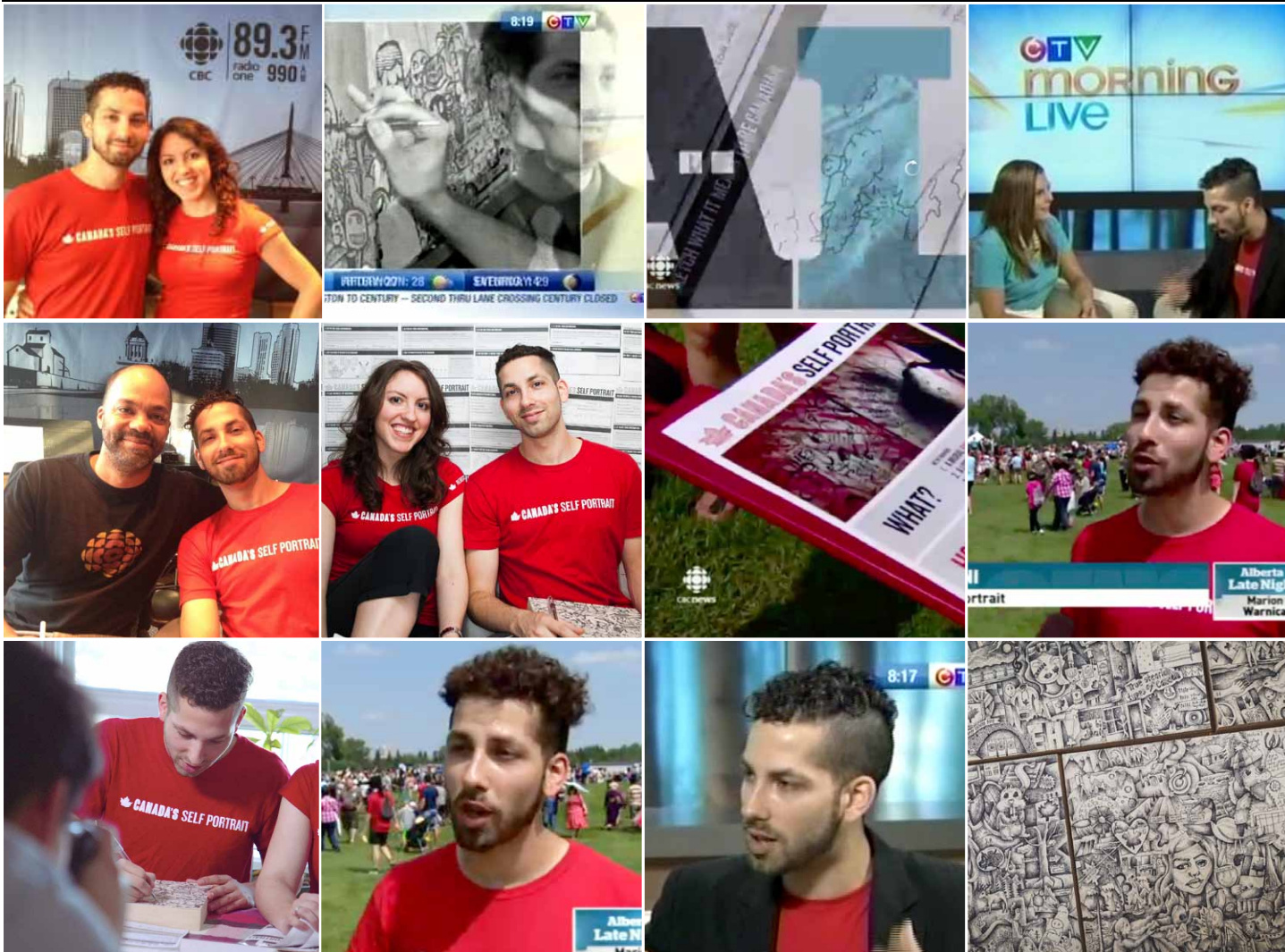
THIS IS WHAT I BELIEVE IN.

In 2012, Montreal's Leacocks Magazine called me "the people's artist." And even though that statement is a bit grandiose, it does clearly describe my mission as an artist - **to create accessible, collaborative artwork** that includes the contributions of the public and re-ignites the joy of art in everyone.

I engage with project participants who might not consider themselves as "artists" to battle the pretentiousness often associated with visual art. It frustrates me that the fear of not getting something perfect and the feeling of not understanding art have stolen the joy of art-making from many people who once loved to create. Art is a powerful tool that should be accessible to all. We are all artists.

Collaborative artwork is not only a way to communicate complex ideas, it's also a way to explore a topic and provide a platform for a wide array of perspectives. Canada's Self Portrait is the ultimate collaborative artwork. 800+ Canadians feeling empowered as artists, exploring the important issue of who we are and what we stand for as Canadians.

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PRESS FOR OUR PROJECT:

Urbana Magazine (print, online). "Autoportrait en fragments" (print). Julie Chaumont. Montreal.

Breakfast Television Montreal (television). "What is Canada's Self Portrait?"

La Presse (print, online). "Esquisse de l'identité canadienne". Éric Clément. Montreal.

CBC Montreal (radio). "Drawing Canadian Identity". Sue Smith. Homerun, CBC Montreal.

Cult MTL (online). "Art this week." Lisa Sproull. Montreal.

Canadian Geographic (online). "Crowdsourced art on Canadian identity." Carys Mills. Toronto.

Applied Arts Magazine (online). "Drawing Canadian Identity" (online). Kristina Urquhart. Toronto.

McGill Reporter (print, online). "Coast-to-coast collaborative creation" (online). Neil McDevitt. Montreal.

Entitled Magazine (online). "Drawing Canadian Identity" (online). Rachel Yeoh. London, UK.

Artistorian (online). "Canada Day with Canada's Self Portrait" (online). Montreal.

CBC Edmonton (television). "Canada's Self Portrait at Heritage Days."

CTV Winnipeg (television). "CTV Morning Live with Kelly Linehan: Canada's Self Portrait."

CBC Nova Scotia (radio). "Yvonne Leblanc-Smith talks to Canada's Self Portrait."

CBC Manitoba (radio, online article). "Winnipeggers wanted for national art project."

CBC Montreal (radio). "Sonali Karnick talks to Canada's Self Portrait" (radio).

Radio-Canada Vancouver (radio). "Un Vancouverois traverse le Canada pour le dessiner."

Victoria Times Colonist (print). "Sketches reveal Canucks' love of country"

McGill Reporter (print, online article). "Our home and creative land."

The Concordian (print). "Art for the People, by the People."

The Link (print). "A Portrait of the Country as a Young Nation."

Montreal Rampage (online article). "My name is Aquil and I am Canadian."

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WATCH THE TRAILER NOW!

VISIT AQUIL.CA/CANADA