



# Kent Monkman,

My name is Aquil Virani and I'm a Canadian visual artist, currently based in Toronto and Ottawa. For my 30th birthday, I'm writing 30 letters to people who have inspired me throughout my life. You are one of those people.

The project a simple experiment to reach out to old and new friends and share good vibes during a tough time. I am posting some of my letters publicly and keeping others more private. You can learn more about the project at [aquil.ca/30letters](http://aquil.ca/30letters).

I would love to hear back from you, if possible, even if it's a single hand-written note that says, "Keep making art, Aquil. From Kent." I've included a pre-stamped self-addressed envelope in case you have a second - it might be the best 30th birthday present I could ask for.

Kent, if you're reading this right now, I'm honoured.

I place your paintings in the pantheon of work I strive to make some day; they are both smart and engaging, subversive and accessible. I appreciate the political strategy in your work in illustrating injustice and irony rather than "preaching." Your work is not only visually impactful and compositionally robust, but historically researched and clever. As I revisit some of my own portrait paintings in my (young) career, I find myself wanting to move away from the seated pose towards a more rich and dynamic narrative approach like yours.

My work sometimes addresses the islamophobia experienced by my Muslim brothers and sisters, but I struggle to depict this violence so directly as seen in some of your works, like "The Scream." Do you ever feel worn down by a pressure to subvert and address injustice in your paintings, now that you've become known for that? Do you feel pigeonholed by your particular painting style, yearning to make different visual decisions? I often wonder how we build a world of culture where non-white artists aren't subtly pushed towards making work only about their non-white identity. I admit this may be insignificant in the broader scheme of things.

I do hope to meet you one day, whether in-person or via video chat. I have researched your career a bit using your CV as a reference. I am genuinely happy to put you in a category of successful artists who didn't attend (a particular kind of) "art school," though you no doubt developed your skills and worldview studying illustration and working thereafter. I find myself wondering how an artist transitions from an individual practice to a production team. Did you simply add assistant by assistant as demand for your work grew? Seeing what you've produced thus far, I am very glad there is more of it in the world.

Thank you, Kent, for your work.

Aquil Virani  
514 677 4137 - [aquil.ca](http://aquil.ca)  
[aquilvirani@gmail.com](mailto:aquilvirani@gmail.com)  
January 15, 2021