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MAGAZINE

December 2020
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Image

Faith Adodo on COVID-19,
Black Women, and Mainstream
Media vs. Social Media

Lifestyle

Pandemic Fashion Fix

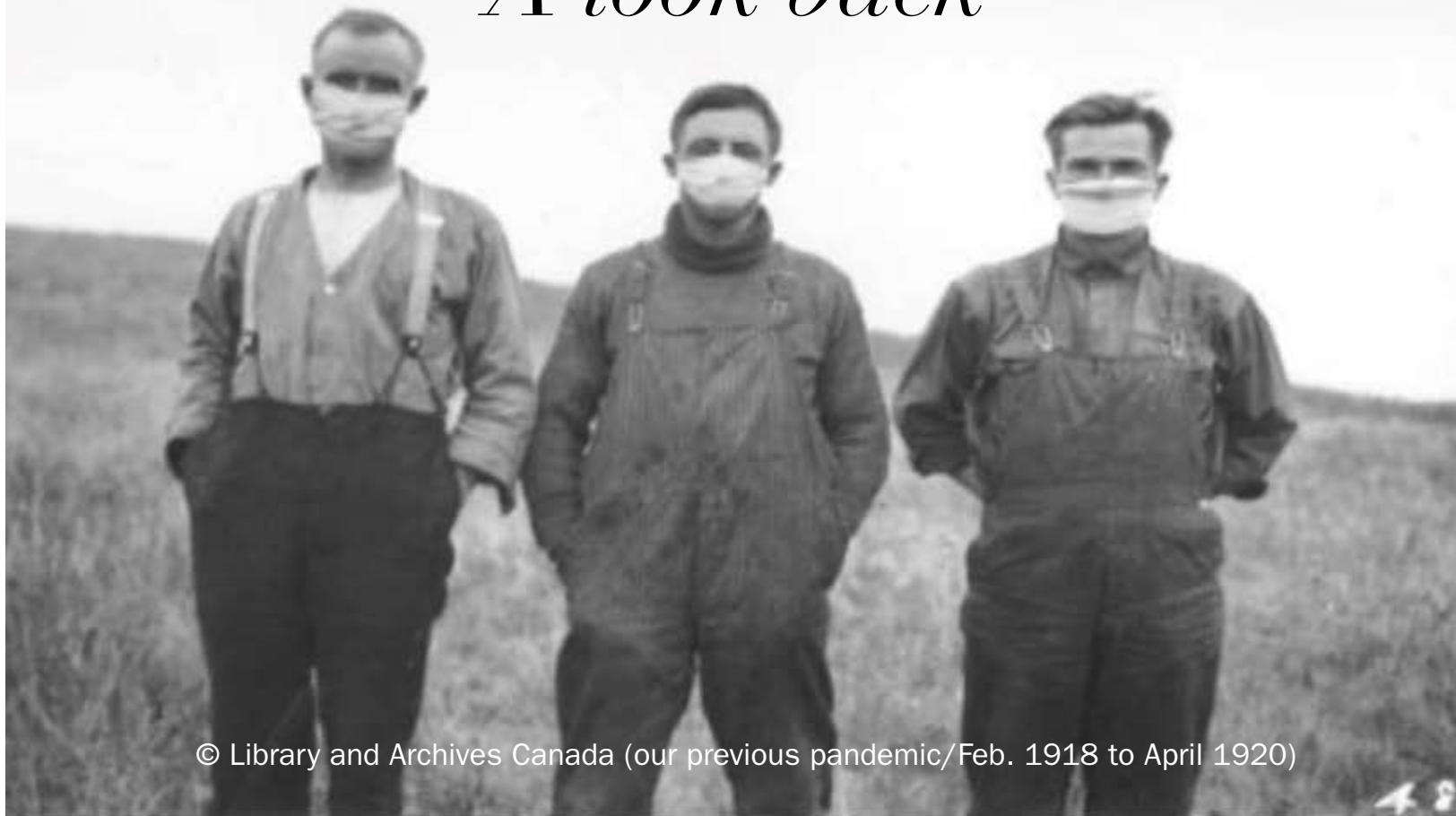
BUSINESS

*Dawit Tibebu: More than a Man
With a Camera*

EXCLUSIVE
FOR THE SAKE OF THE ARTIST

FEATURE
Matriarch
AGNES
MIRANDA:
FAB AT 75

1918 FLU PANDEMIC IN CANADA: *A look back*



© Library and Archives Canada (our previous pandemic/Feb. 1918 to April 1920)

CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES

— Toronto construction workers experienced one of the highest Spanish Flu mortality rates at 9.42 per thousand among occupations in the city. From Sept. 1 to Dec. 31, 1918, 159 construction workers died out of an at-risk group of 16,886. Seen here, crews work on the Bloor Viaduct.



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Si^M Table of
CONTENTS
MAGAZINE



14



16



36

Image

- 7 From the Desk of Shelley
- 10 My Personal War: Empathy vs. Apathy
By Vannesa 'SLUR' Louis
- 22 Faith Adodo on COVID-19; Black Women, and Mainstream Media vs. Social Media
By Shelley Jarrett

Lifestyle

- 12 Your Health is Your Wealth
By Dr. Lisa Ramsackal
- 14 Affairs of the Heart: *Changing this World Starts with You*
By Akua Hinds
- 26 Pandemic Fashion Fix
By Meghan Durnford

BUSINESS

- 35 Fanny Ngantcheu of Kwesiya takes a Big Step in a Pandemic
By Andrew Terry Pasioka
- 36 Dawit Tibebu: More than a Man with a Camera
By Andrew Terry Pasioka

feature

- 16 Matriarch Agnes Miranda
By Claris M. Manglicmot

EXCLUSIVE

- 23 For the Sake of the Artist
BY Andrew Terry Pasioka



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Claris M. Manglicmot
and the front covers she has been responsible for



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There is no question
that women entrepreneurs are
uniquely and
disproportionately
affected by Covid-19

(More than anyone else)...
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The government of Canada has committed \$15 million in new capital to support women entrepreneurs amid the ongoing economic crisis brought on by Covid-19.

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Who is this for?

- Stay-at-home moms
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The Problem:

- Women entrepreneurs owning brick-and-mortar businesses are disadvantaged by trying to maintain their business in the traditional way during Covid-19
- Female business owners will be further negatively affected if they try to re-open and offer their services in the same manner after the pandemic as they did before

The Solution:

- The primary means of doing business has moved online
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- The new normal may mean more work from home rather than an actual business location

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We can all agree that 2020 has been a turbulent year for families and businesses. From an employment standpoint, the hospitality and tourism industries have been hurt the most. Businesses had to learn to pivot (the buzz word of 2020) to become digitally-centric. Now that these twelve months are coming to a painful end, it is time to look at the continuing challenges and opportunities for 2021.

Within any crisis there are always opportunities. I documented some of mine that I took advantage of in our previous issue. As we navigate the second wave of this pandemic, the disproportionate impact on marginalized groups is increasingly alarming and amplifying the disparities that already exist racially and economically. These disruptive forces have exposed inequalities and made them more pronounced. We will have more to say about this crucial topic in our Spring 2021 issue. Sort of our spring budget.

Now that we have reached the 'twelfth month,' I look back and remember that I thought 2020 would have been the year I achieved everything I had planned for in previous years. It was the start of a new decade, and '2020' had a catchy visual connotation to it. With all angst that has transpired I am left just appreciating everything I still have, especially good health.

That seems to be a good place to begin talking about this issue. Nothing about this pandemic has been more tragic than the trail of human devastation it has left on Canada's long term care facilities. So it seems particularly fitting, that for the second time, we are featuring an energetic mid-

seventies senior on our front cover. Way back in Issue No. 6, it was my pleasure to share space with the Hon. Jean Augustine. In 2020 our Fashion & Design Editor Claris M. Manglicmot looks at the incredible multi-faceted legacy being built up by 'Tita' Agnes Miranda.

With my interview of friend and business associate Faith Adodo, we go to another continent to get an African diaspora perspective of not only the current global crisis, but on issues affecting Africa itself. Our regular contributors roll up their sleeves and give us a personal year end assessment of corona, how it may affect the intimacy of the upcoming holiday season, and what 2020 has taught us to be wary of in 2021 (including the inevitable race among companies to be first in the massive roll out of vaccines).

Sometimes the opportunities we are presented with are to look on the bright side of things, even as we are examining the dark side. Andrew's exclusive on the Art Gallery of Mississauga and its innovative program border crossing does just that. His interview with Fanny Ngantcheu shows the resilient spirit of the Kwesiya entrepreneur at its best. This is the 6th time Fanny has been featured; an unprecedented number in an unprecedented year.

This year has touched every heart and every household in ways we will never understand again. We will all get through 2020 and come out on the other side stronger and kinder to each other.

FROM THE DESK OF

Shelley





SEASON'S Greetings

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MY PERSONAL WAR:

empathy vs apathy

By Vanessa Slur Louis

Here we are, in the twelfth month of the dreaded year 2020, and Covid-19 still has the world hostage. And when I say the world, I mean the entire world - the 195 countries which make up that planet we call earth and all its 7.594 billion inhabitants. What an invasion on humanity.

I am sure that you wish like me, that our generation would never have lived through such an experience. We are living through a time where over 1.39 million people have lost their lives to a pandemic. It is more likely than not, that this year was a turning point for many of us. Some of us may have used this time to plan for a new business, or begin the higher education journey. Others, as much as I hate to think of it, may have chosen to do nothing and simply go with the ebbs and the flows of the pandemic situation.

As I write this, I am just simply grateful and thankful that I was able to navigate these past few months with some stability. My interests, both social and economic, grew during these times. I'm thankful that the loss which I've personally suffered because of this monster called Covid-19 has not been greater, nor in vain. For although this monster took my aunt, the loss of only one life in my family, though heartfelt and significant, cannot be

measured against the insurmountable loss of families who've had many members fall victim to this creature. And yes, it is a creature, for it came from the darkness, tormenting its way through all the corners of the earth and leaving its deadly mark of death in every region. And as it did this, the impact on the lives it touched revealed humanity's deepest strengths and weaknesses.

It has been said that irrespective of what goes on around us, life is a circle and will go on; and if these times have taught me anything, it is the truth of this matter. As I reflect on the past months, for a brief moment in time, the light of human nature permeated the air and the world collectively, including those around me, showed care. During the early stages of the pandemic, it seemed that we all became our brother's keeper and the world became, albeit for a tiny moment, a better place.

These days, we have all whether selfishly or unselfishly, consciously or unconsciously, fallen into our new normal. And that new normal seems to have brought back the pre-coronavirus human nature of selfishness and greed. As I look around I try to make sense of how those around me react differently to this pandemic there doesn't seem to be an in between the two extremes.

For the most part, many are accepting that this pandemic is the real thing, and as such, go about their daily lives attempting their best to ensure that they adhere to the guidelines which have been provided. Then, there are those who seem to display no respect for human safety, by hosting illegal parties and exposing hundreds of people to the possibility of contracting this illness. And this has allowed me to question human nature. Is it greed at play, because there are many who are so desperate to "get out" and enjoy some freedom, which they believe has somehow been hijacked. Or perhaps, it is just human nature?

I'm not too sure as to what drives this, but what I do know is that this is just a part of the circle of life. While many of us are trying to follow the rules and stick to the plan which has been handed down by the powers which guide us, many break those rules. It is when these two extremes intersect during the pandemic that my own human nature was tested, and my empathetic and apathetic nature struggled for dominance of each other. And I was forced to ask myself, why is it that humanity is so confusing? Are we as humans driven solely by selfishness and greed or by the mere instinct to survive? Or is it in the words of Herbert Spencer, (and not Darwin, as widely believed) an issue of survival of the fittest?

Quite frankly, although I may hold some resentment toward those in my family who show a blatant disrespect for life, I am not in a position to pass overall judgment. For you see, in the end, it is all about the fittest, not in terms of strength nor aggression, but in this case, one's ability to camouflage and just cooperate in order to survive. How do I determine someone else's greed without understanding the motives behind their actions?

While so many have uncountable losses, my life continued effortlessly. I have been one of those fortunate persons able to positively ride the tide and come out, for lack of better words, on top. I chose to believe those in my family who have successfully reinvented themselves.

When I look back on Covid-19 and being held hostage for almost one year now, I will choose to take refuge that for a brief moment when the light of human nature permeated the air, the world collectively, including those around me, showed care and humanity. And at that point, empathy won my war.

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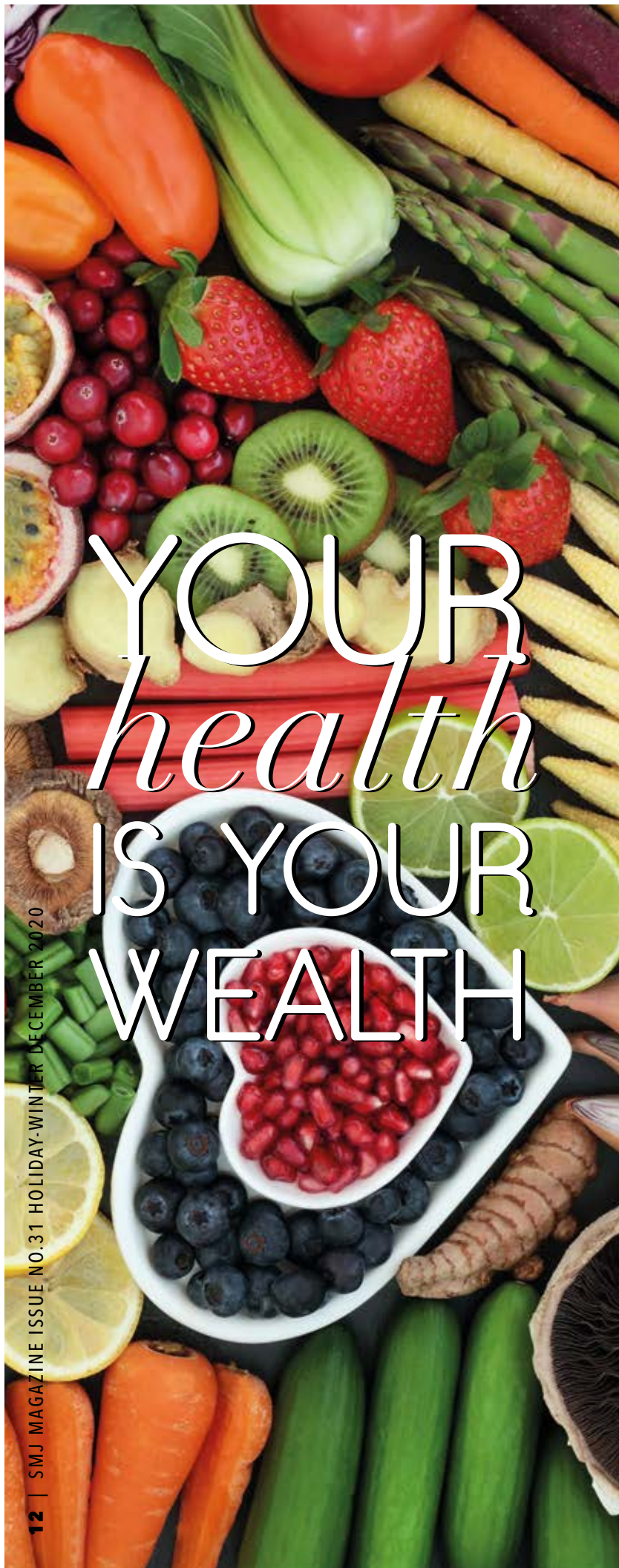
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By Dr. Lisa Ramsackal

As a parent and business owner, 2020 has been a nightmare! From pretty much beginning to end, it's been a right off for many of us. I hate to sound pessimistic, but that's just my reality. And, I'm sure many of you feel the same.

At the end of the year I love to reflect back on the good and bad. And things that I could've changed in order to do better in my every day and in the year ahead.

This year admittedly started off pretty well. From January to March I couldn't complain. Things were pretty steady. Although things were changing in the world around us, I was pretty oblivious to what was about to come. We had planned a family trip to Jamaica in the beginning of March. I was really looking forward to the much-needed vacation. We left knowing that there was talk about this coronavirus. But, we felt pretty safe taking our own precautions, thinking that it was so far removed from us.

So off we went. To a tropical retreat. To some warm sand and sun to enjoy a few days away from home. Our vacation started off like any other vacation. Super excited, pretty upbeat and looking forward to the week ahead. Then, just a couple days into our trip we started hearing about COVID-19 now being classified as a pandemic. Wait! What? Pandemic? I thought what are they talking about? Is this for real? What I had thought was a bit of a nasty cold or flu like virus halfway around the world has just turned into a global pandemic in a blink of an eye. Luckily we were able to complete our vacation but not without the fear of flights being cancelled and us not being able to come back.

And here we are now, living the "new life" with COVID-19. And it seems like it's here to stay for a while, or at least until we get a vaccine. Fingers crossed!

Like many challenges, there are lessons to be learned. What has coronavirus taught me? Firstly, count all of my blessings. There is always a worst scenario than what you may be experiencing. So be grateful of what you have vs. what you don't have. Each day I give thanks for one thing. It may not be something incredible or big. It's mostly the small things I give thanks for. In the end, these are the things that we take for granted. We realize only after that we don't have them, and how impactful or important they really are.

Secondly, my organizational skills have been one of my strengths through all of this. Running a business during COVID-19 has been one of the most stressful things I have ever experienced in my life. We were only a year and a half old when the pandemic hit. I was just learning how to run a business when I had to close temporarily. Then I had to figure out how to keep our doors open when we were allowed to resume care. I can't say that I've had all the answers and things are back to normal. But, it's funny what you can learn about yourself during these times.

Thirdly, seeing the amount of caring and compassion from friends and family during the entire course of the pandemic has been truly wonderful. No doubt, we are all affected by this, but not all in the same way. We all have our day-to-day challenges; some of us have more than others. Keeping in touch with our friends, family and loved ones is more important now than ever. Social distancing has had an impact on our mental health and relationships. I am guilty of "not having enough time" in a day to get work done, and then catch-up or reach out to my friends and family. I don't think of myself as someone important that others would call. So I wouldn't think to just call a friend I haven't heard from in a while. Now I think differently. Picking up the phone is more about checking in on others and making sure that they're ok, rather than them knowing how I am doing. And that's important to me.

Looking towards 2021, I can't say that it will be much better, because truthfully, who really knows what lies ahead? All I can say is that I have much to be thankful for. I hope you also do.

Wishing you all a healthy and wonderful 2021!
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AFFAIRS OF *the Heart:*

Changing this *World Starts* with You

by Akua Hinds

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Changing human behavior takes time. I think that this is one of the most important lessons that I have learned during this year. The unpredictability of the past nine months has been something to experience. People had plans that got cancelled. So did I. New babies entered into this world as always, but 2020 has all been about death. Some leaders rose up and led their people towards being more conscientious and courageous. Other leaders declined taking the opportunity to do the right things. No matter what happens, I know that God is still on the throne. Our futures may be unknown, but they are most definitely secure. The reason why is because we don't have the option to control everything and everyone around us. I actually find that to be comforting because knowing that is the case forces me to focus on the things that I should and can control.

I feel a multitude of emotions when I see news reports of all of the people who have been infected with the coronavirus. Some of those people had mild symptoms and they survived with minimal discomfort. Other victims have permanent long-term health conditions such as amputated limbs, lung damage, and memory loss. Then there all those people who have died. I feel so much sympathy but I also feel a huge responsibility to live my life in a more conscientious way and make good choices. I am lucky to be alive. Some of the choices we make could be the difference between life and death.

Thankfully, vaccines that will help to stave off the coronavirus are in final testing, and the world will hopefully be covid-free by this time next year. Some people think that the vaccine is being rushed but I disagree. I used to think that I would take my time getting the vaccine because I wanted to see how other people fared with it. However, fast is easy and slow is hard. By that, I mean that being proactive and getting things done quickly will help to make the future better for you, for me, and for everyone. It is better to do things now, right now, and do not delay doing what you know to be right.

More than ever, this world needs good leaders, and we need heroes and heroines who will set the best examples. There is much to do, and things will only get done when they are prioritized. Here is what I have learned about priorities this year; nothing in this world will be enjoyable if you do not have good physical and emotional health. Your health affects everything, and it should not be put off. Your future depends upon the steps that you take DAILY to invest in your physical and emotional health. As we have learned through this pandemic, each person's health affects both themselves and the communities in which they operate. Other people's blessings are tied to my obedience.

As we enter this New Year, let's give thanks and step up to be the servant leaders we need to be.



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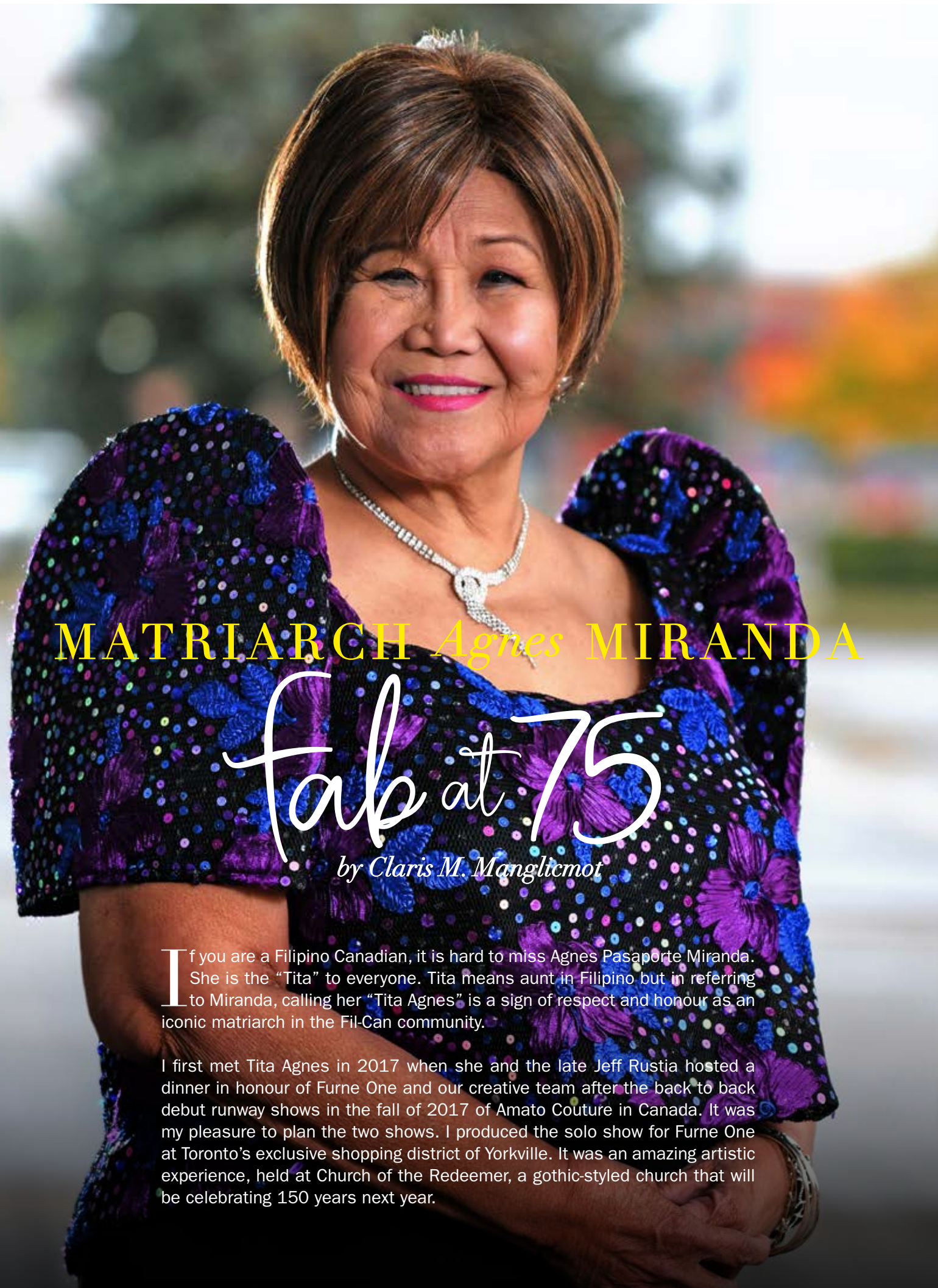


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MATRIARCH Agnes MIRANDA

fab at 75

by Claris M. Manglicmot

If you are a Filipino Canadian, it is hard to miss Agnes Pasaporte Miranda. She is the “Tita” to everyone. Tita means aunt in Filipino but in referring to Miranda, calling her “Tita Agnes” is a sign of respect and honour as an iconic matriarch in the Fil-Can community.

I first met Tita Agnes in 2017 when she and the late Jeff Rustia hosted a dinner in honour of Furne One and our creative team after the back to back debut runway shows in the fall of 2017 of Amato Couture in Canada. It was my pleasure to plan the two shows. I produced the solo show for Furne One at Toronto’s exclusive shopping district of Yorkville. It was an amazing artistic experience, held at Church of the Redeemer, a gothic-styled church that will be celebrating 150 years next year.

That other runway show was at Toronto Women’s Fashion Week. I called Jeff Rustia to see if he would fancy having Amato close the week-long fashion show. He loved the idea and sought the help of Tita Agnes to sponsor Amato’s segment. We didn’t know at that time that it would be the curtain call for TW because of Jeff’s untimely death a few months later in May 2018. One of the wonderful side benefits of that show was that I got to know Tita Agnes better.

This year marks the 35 year anniversary of Tita Agnes’ career in financial business and her advocacy in financial education and literacy. I have never known anyone as active as her at 75. People see Tita Agnes as the epitome of success. Yes, indeed and she has earned it. She starts her day at 4am and spends 10 to 12 hours at work. She says the rest of the day is for fun and family. That made me curious as to how she manages her time. This interview is my attempt to find out how she got to this point of her life so we can all learn from this wonderful woman. We will try to cover all facets of her life including fashion because that’s how I got to know her.

We will start with the business aspect of her life.

Claris: Tita Agnes, 35 years in financial service business is a huge milestone. Not everyone can do what you have done. What is your secret formula?

Tita Agnes: The success of my business is investing in people. I help them define what they want to do, what are their visions, and help them make smart decisions for themselves.

Claris: What sets you and your team apart from other financial service brands?

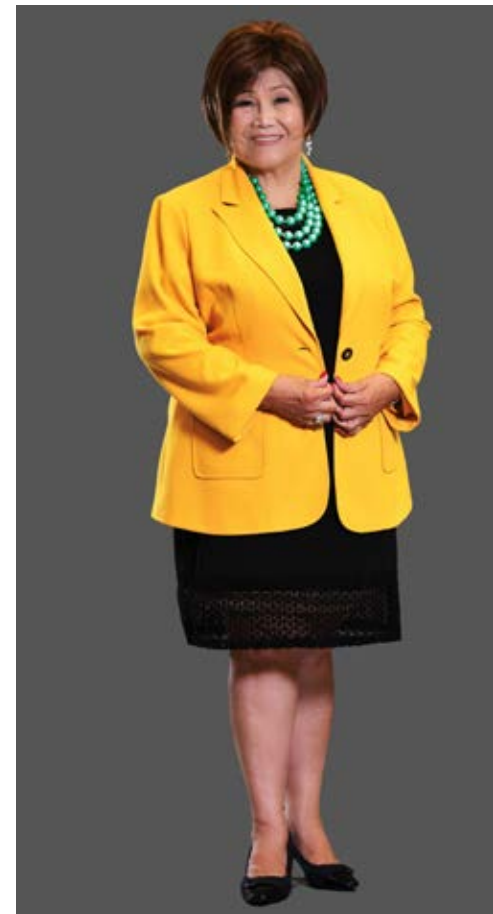
Tita Agnes: It is through financial literacy education... Aside from the usual business trainings and activities, it is very important to teach people to be patient and to maintain integrity and honesty in any circumstance. Understanding each other with sincerity means putting... oneself... in the shoes of others and treating everyone right with respect and patience.

Claris: That is powerful advice; however, most will say it is easier said than done. How did you succeed in applying that to different types of people?

Tita Agnes: I do not judge people. Some are aggressive and strong. Others are shy and quiet. I listen to them and I communicate with them. I try to bring out the best in them.

Claris: How can you spot someone with real potential?

Tita Agnes: I take time talking and listening to them. I observe how they react. After series of trainings those who are really interested will keep calling back and are hungry to learn for more. These are the people who are a good addition to our team. Whenever their interests start to subside because of rejection it is my job to inspire them by doing follow up mentoring.



Claris: Moving to community service, how do you apply your business techniques and success there?

Tita Agnes: In my 35 years in business I learned to understand human nature. Through the years I learned that what you can do is all you can do. The key is listening and communication. I arrived in Canada in 1966. I have seen and joined different organizations. I have seen so many have disagreements and either split up or ceased to be together... everyone had good intentions. It’s just that everyone has different likes and ambitions. I believe that if we all respect each other everyone will find their own place and do well...If I support an organization it is because my purpose is to serve the community. I am friends with everyone.

Claris: I believe that you have the charisma to be friends with everyone at this point in your life. It must have been a long journey to reach that point. How did you deal with your detractors?

Tita Agnes: I do not exactly call it detractors. Some people you meet along the way just give you challenges. I made sure communication was constant and fixed it before it escalated...we usually came up with a good compromise or ended with proper goodbyes and sincere apologies.

Claris: Your success in both business and in community service is so admirable. Give us a glimpse of how you fit in the personal side in your typical day?

Tita Agnes: Self-control and time management is very important. Every day, I work hard to be productive. I continue to learn, work hard and stick to my goals.



Tita Agnes loves to dress up in parties. Here she is in gown assortments by Fashion Designer Renee Salud and the banana fabric cape wraps by Ditta Sandico.



Consistency is a very important factor to be successful. I work for about 10 to 12 hours at my office in WFG. I start my day at 4:00am. I check messages and emails; fix breakfast and dress up to leave for office. I do power naps in between to get me through the day. The rest of my day I leave for fun and for family.

Claris: You are indeed a superwoman. What else do you do to take care of your health?

Tita Agnes: I don't smoke nor drink alcohol. I have regular massage sessions and reflexology. I visit the spa very often. At home I use my elliptical machine and do regular sauna. I also take variety of supplements to boost my immune system and get nourishments that I may miss in my normal meals.

Claris: That is amazing. Besides being active, what else do you do for your mental health?

Tita Agnes: I pray a lot...I read a lot of educational and inspirational books...success stories of people I admire such as Oprah Winfrey.

Claris: You have mentioned fun and family several times. What do you do for fun?

Tita Agnes: I love to eat. I do this a lot with my family, friends and associates. I love to try different cuisines but I always go back to Filipino, Mediterranean and Italian dishes. In my efforts to stay healthy I developed the liking of fish recipes.

I travel a lot as well, which includes my bonding with my daughters. I've been around the world but I see myself going back to countries in Europe and Asia. I love Italy, Greece, France, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan and of course the Philippines.

Claris: You may or may not answer if you think I am invading your privacy. Please tell me a bit about your family.

Tita Agnes: My late husband passed away in 2006. I have survived with two beautiful daughters. They are both grown up and successful in their own way. Melissa my first born loves Europe and is living in Turkey. My youngest will most likely follow my career in business but at this point she focuses her time in raising her kids.

Claris: Last but not the least, I know you love fashion and this is where we met. What in particular do you love about fashion?

Tita Agnes: Before I go to work, go to events or packing for a trip, fashion is very much a part of my routine. My fashion style is conservative. I like classic design but trendy. I wear a lot of business suits, but I also love gowns. My favorite is the Philippine butterfly sleeve gown or Filipiniana. I also try different designs for fun. I have friends in fashion who dress me up. I admire fashionistas like Tyra Banks, Naomi Campbell and Linda Evangelista.

It was very inspiring talking to Tita Agnes. I had to Google Linda Evangelista thinking that my fashion knowledge is already rusty. We may find other success stories similar to hers but knowing that she is in the financial service industry made me respect her even more. She has mastered so many things through the years. People of her age have retired a long time ago, yet Tita Agnes behaves as if she is still at her peak. It has made me think twice about retirement even though I am partially there already. Tita Agnes is an extraordinary woman. Iconic indeed!

Special Credits:

*Thank you Mr. Danny Orbillo for sending us the photo archives and files needed for this interview.

*Thank you RJ Ensalada (New York) for helping me with the final photo edits of all the images used in this feature. I appreciate your patience in doing multiple changes to ensure we have what we needed.

Photo Credits:

Photographers: Nick Rivera and Danny Orbillo
Hair and Make Up: Candace David
Photo Editor: RJ Ensalada (New York)
Wardrobe: Renee Salud and Ditta Sandico
Accessories: Personal collections of Agnes Miranda



In 2017, Agnes Miranda received the RBC Top 25 Canadian Immigrant Awards

In September 2020, Agnes Miranda received the most coveted Top 25 Legacy Award of World Financial Group, recognizing her and her team for the most number of families helped in her entire WFG career.

FAITH ADODO

On Covid-19, Black Women And Mainstream Media Vs. Social Media

By Shelley Jarrett

Faith Adodo is a Nigerian-born Canadian. She is a wife and mother of four lovely children. Faith is currently a Teaching Assistant at York University and a fourth year Ph.D. Candidate in Gender Feminist and Women's Studies at York. She is a motivational speaker, content creator, script writer and Talk show Host. She is the CEO and Founder of the Prestigious Talk Show, based in Toronto, Canada. Faith was selected as one of the Top 100 Black women to watch in Canada in 2017.

I did a phone interview with Faith recently, to get her perspective and thoughts on the state of our nation, how her family is coping during COVID-19, protests in Toronto this past summer regarding serious unrest in Nigeria, and what to look forward to in 2021.

She started off by thanking God for bringing her and her family safely through to the end of the year. Faith feels the coronavirus pandemic has taught her some valuable lessons.

"In this pandemic, we should join hands together in love because love moves mountains. This is a mountain that we are all experiencing now. Once we come together in love we shall overcome this."

Faith falls back on her namesake and a familiar Biblical phrase by reminding women to always remember they are not alone and to walk by faith, not by sight. She reiterated the importance of love, even within the discrimination that stills exists today.

Continuing in that vein, Faith believes in the inclusion, equality, and empowerment of different marginalized groups in our society. Her passion is focused on women and youth from the African community. Faith has used her show as a platform to help and support different immigrant women, including those from the Nigerian community, to achieve their educational goals.

That is why Faith spent a lot of time late summer to join forces with other nationals from her community to protest the unrest in her home of Nigeria. She talked about the police brutality, killing youths and beating women, without any accountability. They protested to make Canadians aware of what was happening in Nigeria.

Knowing Faith is from a large family with many relatives living here in Canada, I wanted to her view on the possible social gathering restrictions this Christmas. She said the pandemic has been good and bad at the same time. It has given herself pause for personal reflection on the things that are really important. There is an opportunity for



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reestablishment or regeneration of intimate relationships within the immediate family. On the other hand, there will be challenges regarding on going or special extended family and friend relationships.

Faith said with the second wave, all she wants to ask God for all her family to survive. Looking forward towards the New Year, she is optimistic that there would be positive changes both in her personal and business life. She sees bright light coming out at the end of a dark tunnel.

Faith had a final thought on 2021 and on society as a whole finally getting the best of the pandemic. "If you are hoping for something, if you are dreaming for something, don't give up on it until it becomes reality."

In closing, Faith acknowledged SMJ Magazine and this Publisher's chair...

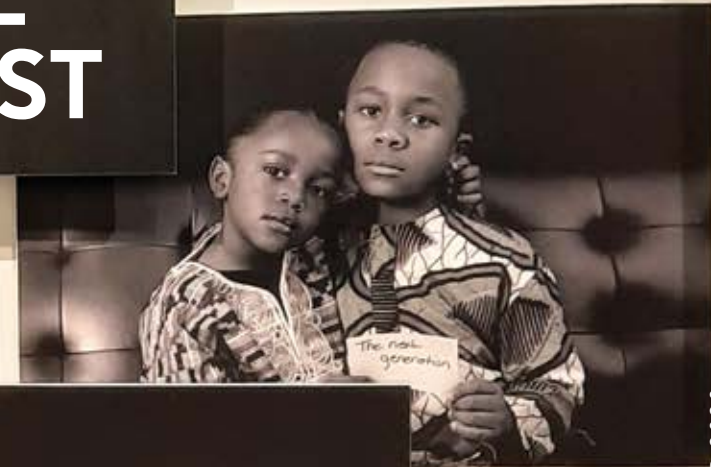
"We need strong black women like us to position ourselves in places of authority so we can help each other. You have clearly demonstrated that in what you do. I really appreciate you and admire what you are doing in the community, positively affecting the lives of immigrants and black women."

Faith Adodo is an example of a trend that needs to both expand and continue: that of strong black women coming to the forefront to speak on serious issues of the day, and assume major positions of authority, such as what will be happening in the White House in January 2021 when Kamala Harris will be the first woman and BIPOC Vice-President in American history. We need to have more women like Ms. Adodo and Ms. Harris in front of mainstream media cameras rather social media cameras.



FOR THE SAKE OF THE ARTIST

by Andrew Terry Pasioka



"The first step to finding a solution is admitting that there is something to be fixed."



It's been a challenging year for all of us, for some professions especially so. The Publisher in her 'From the Desk of...' singled out hospitality and tourism, and if we could mention only one more, it would be the whole arts industry, from fashion to entertainment, inclusive of sports. It is a spectrum of public figures all dependent on mass (not masked) spectators. Prominent here in Mississauga is the Art Gallery, better known as the AGM. In addition to the current second lockdown of the year, they have had to cope with socially distanced and reduced attendance during the summer and fall when they were temporarily open. But that was not all.

Just as they were reopening in June after the first lockdown, they had to deal with an uncomfortable situation. The AGM had to respond to allegations of racism and bullying, as well as calls to "...replace all operators, staff members and board members. " To their credit they moved swiftly and decisively, and in the process, demonstrated to a lot of corporations who tend to move at a slower pace what timely due diligence looks like.

Once they put this behind them, it was time to put the focus back to where it belongs: on the artist. To that end, the newly blended staff and Board have put together some thoughtful and community engaging exhibitions. The phrase 'community engagement' is an appropriate description of where the AGM wants to go in this decade and beyond. Their website states:

The AGM fosters community, transcends disciplinary boundaries and provides spaces where alternative modes of thought are supported and activated in tangible ways. Our approach to engagement is to contemplate, represent and interact with the vibrant and layered lived experiences of the city – its human geography.



City of Mississauga's Cultural Division (@citymississauga). They contain stories that have impacted and changed the lives of Artists who tell them, through art. The audience is left with a new understanding and a better sense of community and connection. An Interactive and Live video from November featuring artist, author and police services officer Debbie Miller and former RCMP and inmate Kwesi Milligan was just uploaded in early December. In it Debbie relates her gripping journey that took her to a photographic project on racism inspired by the tragic story of George Floyd. Then Kwesi relates his heartbreaking tale of how community service turned into conviction and incarceration.

The next display we viewed was Francis Ferdinand's installation 26, emanating from the artists 3-month stay in 2015 in her homeland of Sri Lanka. Ferdinands' vision became revitalization through re-interpretation within a contemporary context, which was a pattern of 26 multi-colored sandals. The number was significant, for each pair of sandals represented one year of the 26-year Sri

Lankan civil war (1983-2009). In the artist's own words, she says the slippers "...symbolically suggest a step forward into a new era."

To that end, the Publisher and I were able to pay a visit to the AGM in November. We had the good fortune to meet three of the key individuals that make up the newly blended AGM. They included President of the Board Leslie Silvestri, staff Executive Director Anna Gulbinski, and former long-time Executive Director of the Mississauga Arts Council Linda Thomas, who is Project Lead of the specially funded border crossings Project.

Our visit was just prior to the second lockdown, so even if the facility is not able to reopen again until the New Year, their current programs can be viewed on their website, in a succinct and a vividly detailed virtual tour, and on YouTube. We want to talk about three of them in particular which are all current exhibitions to January 7th, 2021.

We will start with border crossings, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation (@ontrillium) through the Grow Grant, the Ontario Arts Council (@ontarioartscouncil) and The



The beautiful thing about art is that it is open to interpretation. In this writer/artist's eyes the pattern of the sandals seems to represent the beauty of the cause but the futility of the direction evident in all civil wars. They symbolically are modern-day Israelites, locked in a 26-year 'exodus', aimlessly wandering within the conflict and unable to break out.

Lastly we come to a collection of ceramic pieces entitled Rhythm. Presented by Artist Bhavna Bhatnagar, the inspiration is Nature, Philosophy, and her ethnic background. Bhava's works also exhibit her Canadian influences, thus creating a modern-western and classical Indian fusion. She says that her deep respect for her South Asian cultural roots and Canadian branches created her 'rhythm.'

One of her most interesting pieces is the intersecting of two waves, a companion to her first professional work which we took a photo of with her standing beside.



We have the 'Blue Jay wave' here in southern Ontario, but in this case, the recent piece speaks to the spiritual connection that many of us have to water. It was no coincidence that this was Bhavna's first art piece. She was inspired by her mother, a music and print artist, and rooted in the aesthetics of Rasjasthan, India, a blend of spiritual and natural imagery.

There was much more to see, but time and the eminent closing of the Gallery was running against us. Two hours had gone by just like that. Until such time as the AGM is reopened yet again, you will have to suffice with that splendid virtual tour, the Miller-Milligan You Tube video, and trolling the website. When they do finally re-open, make a point of supporting the AGM or any art gallery that is closest to you. It is just this writer/artist speaking, but I am guessing that once we put the coronavirus behind us for good, no politician or political pundit is going to pinpoint the precarious position we were put in like an artist. One you can find at the Art Gallery of Mississauga.

www.artgalleryofmississauga.com/about/
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PANDEMIC FASHION FIX

wardrobe
TFL Couture
accessories
Jewels Box
footwear
Nike

By Meghan Durnford

This summer, the creative crew behind Couture Culture and Arts (CCA) seized the opportunity to get back to business and held editorial photo shoots in downtown Toronto, produced in partnership with His and Her Model Management. All three shoots featured Toronto landmarks, including the high fashion shopping district of Yorkville, the urban and nautical Queen's Quay, and finally the historic destination of the St. Lawrence Market.

Since the pandemic began, CCA had not done any shoots. Everyone involved in the project took the utmost precautions about being as safe as possible, and though it was a different experience than usual with face masks and loads of sanitizer, the team managed to pull off three separate and successful photo shoots.

After going so long without any creative collaboration it was definitely time to try to get back to normal a little bit, and resume our usual activities. We worked with two very talented photographers for the shoots, Omri Li-on and Olga Hutsul. Both brought a different feel and aesthetic to their respective work. We shot a young up-and-coming talent from Calgary, Adam Bryl, who visited Toronto for a few days to take part in the three sessions. CCA was glad to give opportunity and support to the 15-year-old with major potential, and so pleased with the way that the photos turned out.

The wardrobe featured many beautiful designs, prominently displaying the work of Toronto designer Tristan Licud of TFL Couture. Tristan also served as co-creative director of the three fashion stories, and did double duty editing most of the post-production photos and videos. His wardrobe creations had a variety of bold prints in a range of styles including collared button-down shirts with intricate origami-inspired white leather detailing. There were also matching suit pieces such as trouser shorts and zip-up sleeveless sweaters done in a striking print emblazoned with spades.

At the center of Toronto couture, Yorkville, Adam rocked smart street wear, with the dynamic patterned pieces on display. For the more laid-back Queen's Quay shoot, the style was a more rugged and leisurely weekend look. Lastly for the classic architecture of the St. Lawrence Market Adam was dashing in formalwear. Wardrobe for all three of the set-ups perfectly tied into their locales, and Adam effortlessly transitioned between the accompanying vibes and attitudes of each.

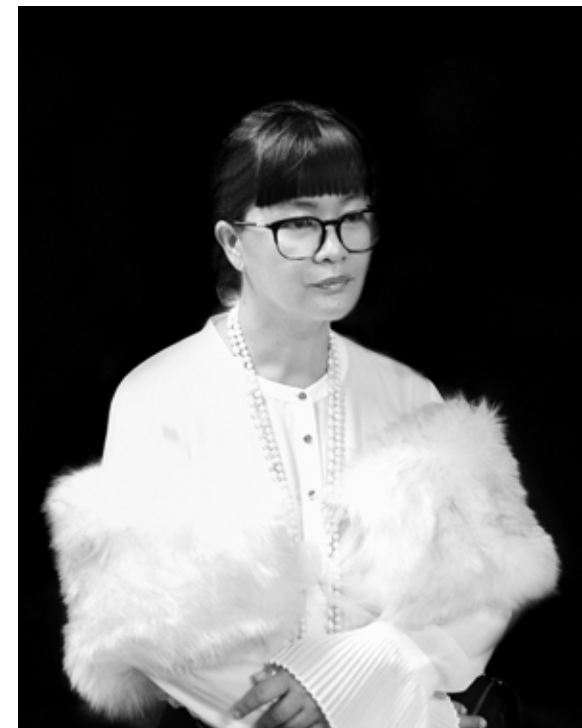
The entire creative plan from conception to execution

was overseen by CCA Creative Director and founder Claris Minas Manglicmot. Our generous sponsor, Ash of His and Her Model Management, once again made it possible for these photo shoots to take place. An additional special touch on-set of these shoots was having Claris's family take part in different areas in order to help out and minimize the amount of contact with creative people on the team. Her son Clarc Manglicmot was our in-house videographer, capturing behind the scenes action. Assisting with wardrobe and production was myself, Meghan Durnford, and Claris's daughter Claire Manglicmot. Claris's husband even assisted with the logistics.

For now, with the pandemic far from over, we have once again paused our efforts, but our passion for fashion

cannot be quelled and we will continue to find innovative ways to be creative once again in future. We are eagerly looking ahead and to the light at the end of the tunnel, knowing that we will get to work our magic again and continue to create.

We caught up with the creative team from these photo shoots to see how they are handling pandemic life, and ask them a few questions:



Claris Minas Manglicmot:

1. What you may have learned about yourself, your love ones, and as a person in general in this pandemic?

This pandemic has taught me a lot of lessons. It helped me connect with what matters most which are my family and real friends. It left me thinking how I will do some things differently. In this pandemic I learned that people I think I know very well have different views from mine in terms of urgency and critical matters. I learned to understand and accept them anyway.

2. Since pandemic advises us to responsibly practice social distancing, how will you be dealing with the most intimate family times?

My family has been practicing hard-core social distancing since the pandemic started and so it is the same during the holidays. Our Christmas present to our front-liners is to do our best to stay healthy. We will be spending Christmas with just our same household members. Before Christmas we will send presents via postal mail and porch drop off. We can still celebrate together via video camera on actual time such as opening presents together and welcoming the New Year.



wardrobe
Suits by Curtis Elliot
Suits by Curtis Elliot
Jewels Box

3. What 2020 has taught you about looking ahead to 2021?

This year has taught me the importance of social connection. In better times I shy away from regularly seeing friends and family for coffee or lunch thinking that they are just around. Indeed, I can talk or text them now but given almost a year of the pandemic I can tell you how different it is from the joy of seeing them in person. When all of this is over, I will make more efforts to see and connect with friends and family.

Tristan Licud:

1. What you may have learned about yourself, your love ones, and as a person in general in this pandemic?

Appreciation is what I have learned about myself in overcoming such great challenges. Appreciating pretty much everything you hold on to at the moment such as essential goods, your health, and especially time to spend to our love ones which also includes our pet is the blessings which we cling onto towards the great reset.

2. Since pandemic advises us to responsibly practice social distancing, how will you be dealing with the most intimate family times?

By cancelling non-essential meetings which can also leads to more time to our family were the most responsible things we can do during this pandemic. Adding more precious moments such as simple movie times plus cooking and any other activities you share interest are some of the most effective activities for intimate family time.

3. What 2020 has taught you about looking ahead to 2021?

Although we have so many great challenges during this unparalleled time, we can also look forward for a brighter tomorrow by having a well balanced positive thinking for new beginnings.

Adam Bryl:

1. What you may have learned about yourself, your love ones, and as a person in general in this pandemic?

In this pandemic I've learned how to appreciate little things, how time spent with my family is much more important and how much I miss being

around people. I also realized that discipline is important. With online schooling, you can get very easily distracted and having a daily routine helps you get organized.

2. Since pandemic advises us to responsibly practice social distancing, how will you be dealing with the most intimate family times?

We will be spending quality time together by cooking together, working out, playing board game, going for walks.

3. What 2020 has taught you about looking ahead to 2021?

2020 taught me to appreciate little things and appreciate my family and how important our health is. I am looking forward to spending more time with my family and take care of my body and soul by keep working out, reading and having meaningful conversation with my family. I also realized how much I miss travelling with my family. I look forward to 2021 where we could possibly visit my grandparents in Poland, walk NYFW, Paris FW and other modelling adventures.

Olga Hutsul:

1. What you may have learned about yourself, your love ones, and as a person in general in this pandemic?

It gave us enough time to focus on family, which never seems to be enough. Overall a big part of me is an introvert and as an introvert I love the downtime, either with the book or a nice walk outside.

2. Since pandemic advises us to responsibly practice social distancing, how will you be dealing with the most intimate family times?

We are a small family, all under one roof, in the same bubble, so we will be spending a bit more time together, maybe some time at the cottage.

3. What 2020 has taught you about looking ahead to 2021?

2021 will be definitely about fewer events, more e-commerce, and social media. There will be more online shopping. We will have to master our online communication skills, Zoom and Whatsapp meetings. I have a feeling that some things will never go back to "before pandemic" times.



Tristan Licud
Toronto Men's
Fashion Week



Olga Hutsul



wardrobe
TFL Couture
accessories
Jewels Box
footwear
Nike

Meghan Durnford:

1. What you may have learned about yourself, your love ones, and as a person in general in this pandemic?

This year, dealing with the pandemic has shown me that family and friends are the most important things to me. Friends of mine have had their first and second babies this year, and it has been so difficult not being there for them or seeing the little ones in person. I have learned that I can function pretty well as a homebody, but that human element and connection is something that I need more than I realized before.

2. Since pandemic advises us to responsibly practice social distancing, how will you be dealing with the most intimate family times?

With the holiday season coming up, my family and I will be sticking to our individual households to celebrate this year. We will also try to visit virtually with the people we would have usually seen for the holidays. It will be a departure from the regular festivities which usually see 20-30 family members gathering together to enjoy Christmas, but hopefully such sacrifices will be worthwhile in the long run.



Meghan Durnford

3. What 2020 has taught you about looking ahead to 2021?

The stress and strife of 2020 has tested all of us in many ways. It has shown us how adaptive, resilient, and resourceful we all can be when we need to. Looking ahead to 2021, I have a lot of hope and cautious optimism that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I look most forward to opportunities to be creative again, and to seeing loved ones in person again.

The sentiments of the team show just how much everyone is longing for some sense of normalcy in the midst of this pandemic. It is also abundantly evident how much we are all missing time spent with families and friends. Hopefully sooner rather than later we will be able to visit once again with the people that we miss, and do the things we haven't been able to do in a long time. Until then we will try to find the joy in the simplicity of life in 2020. After all it's the little things that count, and the little things are all that we have right now.

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Models
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@meg_durnford
Claire Manglicmot
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Videographer:
Clarc Manglicmot
@watercos



wardrobe
Suits by Curtis Elliot
accessories
Jewels Box
Fanny pack
Fendi

ABOUT THE TOWN WITH





SMJ Magazine has been following this young designer ever since she started out over seven years ago. It has been two and a half years since SMJ's last coverage at her 5th anniversary show at The Cube (reported in our Issue No. 21, Anniversary/Summer 2018). Since then Fanny Ngantcheu has gone from runway to retail in a big way.

This change in focus comes from gaining confidence in understanding her market as a maturing entrepreneur. It has taken this long because Fanny has also had to adapt to the North American market. She moved to Toronto from Paris in 2010 to find a whole different world existed from her native Africa or her adopted home, the 'City of Lights.' So much of Parisian population is openly stylish; it was like seeing a 'reality runway' daily on the streets. In Canada that doesn't happen to nearly the same extent. She sees her target market on the streets, but has paid attention to what they are wearing so as to anticipate what products would entice them.

Almost immediately after founding Kwesiya, Fanny started spending as much time creating accessories in African prints, patterns, and styles as she did major pieces of her collection. This would introduce women into African fashion in a small way, to get them to buy something that would be a complimentary extra piece to a favorite ensemble from their existing wardrobe. It has paid off; she won Accessory Designer of the Year at African Fashion Week Industry Awards in 2018.

It was that year that Kwesiya's focus began to shift into establishing a strong retail presence. She was able to negotiate some space with a vendor at the eclectic Kensington Market in downtown Toronto. In 2019 Kwesiya was

placed in three other locations within the GTA, one out as far as Oshawa. Her selection process of stores has been consistent. Fanny pays attention as to how an owner choose their inventory, where they locate, and the type of customers they attract.

"These owners had to have a certain energy that showed me I could work with them. I also had to visualize my collection working with the rest of the merchandise in the store, and I had to visualize the customers that shop there would be interested in what I was selling."

This past August 29th Fanny took Kwesiya to a whole new level when she opened up her flagship store at 171 Harbord Street, at the western edge of the University of Toronto campus. In the middle of a global pandemic. Scary, yes, but exciting too. Her commentary on whole process was illuminating and covered a lot of ground.

"The project was bigger than I imagined. I was at the right place at the right time. Because of COVID-19, I was not going to spend a lot of money on material and a lot of time expanding my collection. I had the time to stay calm, collect my thoughts, and think how I wanted the space to look."

Fanny is being modest, but this savvy businesswoman used the experience she gained from nearly a year long illness in 2015 not to panic, know to slow down and move forward without stopping. The modesty also is reflective in her understanding of what makes a successful creative team. She is quick to point out that she has two staff now, and when she sees them working so hard and coming up with ideas, she realizes that Kwesiya has become more than just Fanny Ngantcheu.

Spoken like a woman who believes in legacy.

www.kwesiya.com

FANNY NGANTCHEU

of Kwesiya

TAKES A BIG FASHION STEP IN A PANDEMIC

By Andrew Terry Pasioka





MORE THAN A MAN WITH A CAMERA

DAWIT TIBEBU:

By Andrew Terry Pasioka

Two pilgrims walking together in a dramatic landscape on their way to Tedbabe Mariam,
Amhara Sayenet, Ethiopia 2017

From my series Ethiopian Pilgrimage that has been exhibited in UNESCO Headquarters in Paris France in 2017

Dawit Tibebu is a photo-journalist, and in saying that, he becomes one of my favorite persons because he encompasses two of my favorite pastimes. However, he also says he strives to be a global citizen, which is a goal I can definitely not claim. He has been in his chosen profession for eight years; three years in Canada since he immigrated here, and five years before that in his homeland of Ethiopia. His travel stories have evolved into observations on daily travel and routines. My background pales in comparison; I have spent almost all my life travelling and living between Alberta and Ontario. What has he learned in those eight years and how has he grown.

"I was a photographer first and learned journalism in post-secondary school. Every day that I am practicing my craft I am learning and I am becoming better, such as better habits and new ways to use my equipment. But I am also 'unlearning' old habits and old ways. That makes me a better professional. The better professional I become, the better stories I can tell."

Sounds like I still have some learning to do, but I wanted to learn more about this 'global citizen' first.

Dawit's father was an Orthodox priest who was a great storyteller, and his mother was a great writer of spiritual subjects. The 'journalist' portion of his vocation as a 'photo-journalist' is obvious. I was wondering if the spirituality that both his parents exhibited was where he received the gift of visualizing thoughts? He replied in the affirmative, saying that because Biblical stories are very visual, this was the germination of the gift.

His best-known work in Ethiopia was the GUZO project in book form. Would he say that the ultimate goal of the GUZO project was to create a travelogue of Ethiopia? Not only there he replies, but to take the reader to places whose stories were up to that time unspoken and to other parts of the world that are unknown. That's how he wants to become a global citizen.

Dawit has written of the many challenges that he has faced in getting the material. "the political views and instability; the destination's unpopularity and the corrupt system... destinations...are endangered and not preserved as they should is my everyday regret."

The situation is no better, five years after publication of the book. Tourists can travel in relative safety to the places he has highlighted, even though, as we speak, headlines speak of 'Ethiopia risks exploding into a myriad of ethnic groups,' much like Yugoslavia did in the early 1990s. Diplomacy is in doubt, and there is talk of an African Union-led effort towards resolution. Dawit's inability to continue partnering with his government and stakeholders in the country may have to do with their pre-occupation with politics, but for him it has been an abrupt end to funding.

"I can still travel to the places, take the photos, and gather the supporting material, but to make the book, publish it, advertise and distribute it, that's another matter."

And now COVID-19 has completely taken over global society. In light of this, it puts a different spin on comments he has made previously about following one's passion or purpose.

"Most people will seek for a job that can secure their monthly bill and make a living. Some of them also have a family to take care of here and back home as well. And with that responsibility, it could be difficult to accommodate that and also be able to give full commitment to your profession. And that is okay to do side jobs for the time being to make a living. What is not okay is to settle there and neglect your profession."

He agrees that the pandemic has forced us to settle. Not all the stories he wants to tell can be done virtually. Sometimes compromising works and sometimes it doesn't.

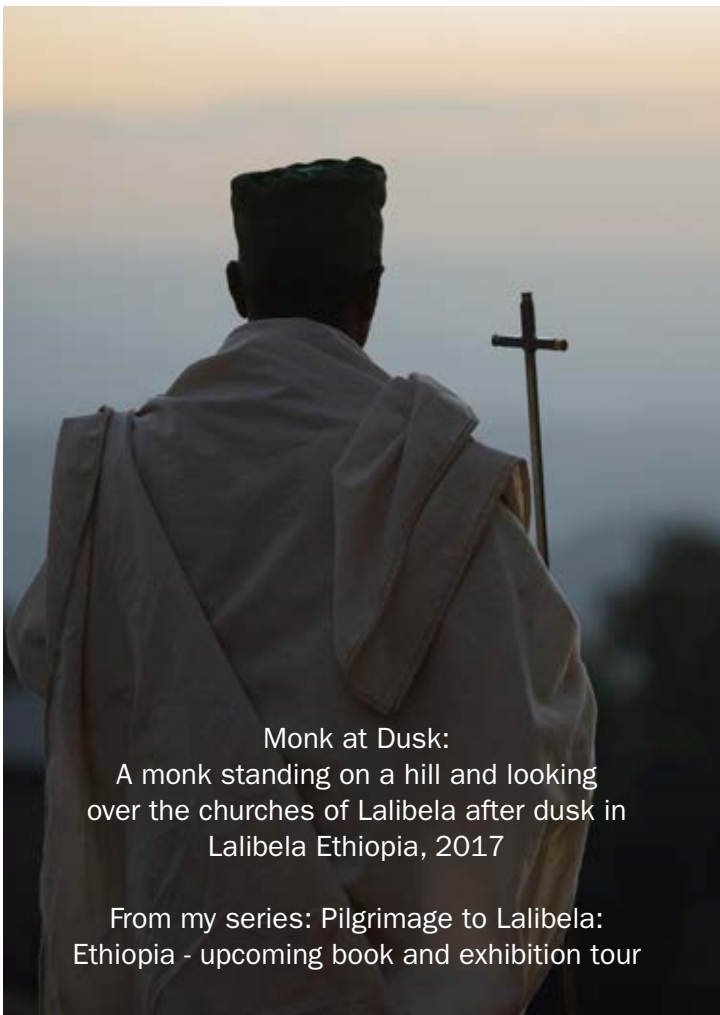
One compromise that did work out was his October 2020 exhibition entitled Freedom "Fighters: Ethiopia" at the Black Artists' Network in Dialogue (BAND) Gallery in Toronto. Dawit did not want the year to go to waste, so he turned to photographs and displays back home that already existed. He was able to bring awareness and education to a brand new audience in Canada that could connect the exhibits with the Black Lives Matter movement. He especially wanted black students to identify these heroes and their stories with those of John Lewis and George Floyd here in North America.

One interesting observation Dawit made was Western photo-journalists not being able to connect with Black subjects in the way that he could is perceptive but also open to rebuttal. How does he compensate for that when he is photographing and interviewing a non-Black subject? His answer is to the point: research and respect.

On-the-spot reporting and scoop photography responding to an immediate opportunity can work from time to time, but more often detailed research and a second opinion on the subject is required, in order to really understand the material you are being given. This is especially true when you are working in an environment that you are not native to or is new to you. When you are able to impart a final piece as if you were intimately involved with the subject or the issue, you will know you have arrived as a global citizen.

And with that, we have come around full circle, back to the beginning. Just like the world we live in.

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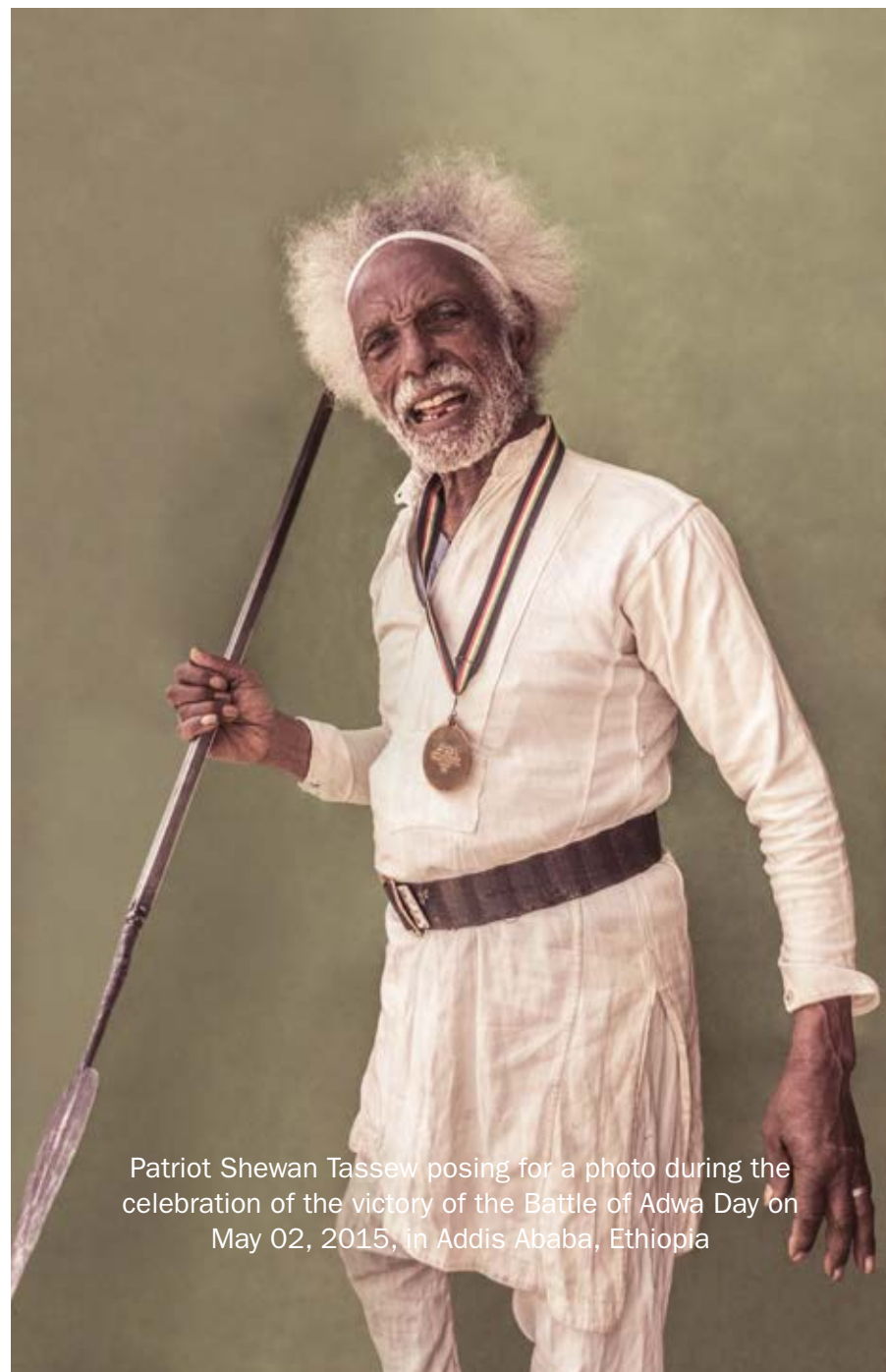


Monk at Dusk:
A monk standing on a hill and looking
over the churches of Lalibela after dusk in
Lalibela Ethiopia, 2017

From my series: Pilgrimage to Lalibela:
Ethiopia - upcoming book and exhibition tour



A mother of twins sitting on a balcony waiting for
their turn to get a vaccination for her kids in Assosa,
Benshangul, Ethiopia 2016



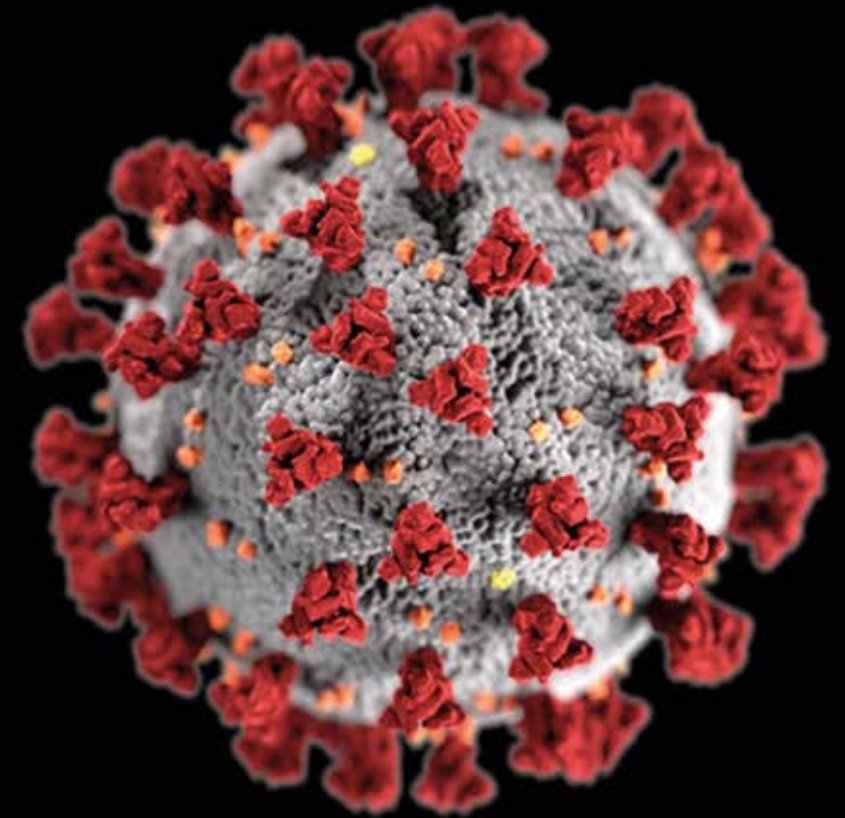
Patriot Shewan Tassew posing for a photo during the
celebration of the victory of the Battle of Adwa Day on
May 02, 2015, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



*In With
The New*

2021 (HAPPY NEW YEAR)

*Out With
The Old*



2020 (THE YEAR OF THE VIRUS)



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