

Diplomacy this week



Serbian chargé d'affaires Mirjana Šešum-Curčić, Indonesian Ambassador Dienne H. Moehario, and artist Marina Gavanski-Zissis at the Serbian Embassy's International Women's Day event on March 5. The painting shows the Serbian Empire's Tsarina Milica. Embassy Photo: Sam Garcia



SNEH DUGGAL
Chatter House

Celebrating strong women through art

Marina Gavanski-Zissis has become one of the many faces of International Women's Day, which took place on March 8.

From a woman's power, beauty and grace, to her strengths, dilemmas and dreams, Ms. Gavanski-Zissis tries to capture and share womanhood through her paintings.

Her work was on display at Ottawa City Hall in March last year during an evening hosted by former Bosnian Ambassador Biljana Gutlić-Bjelica in honour of International Women's Day.

At the time, Ms. Gavanski-Zissis pointed to one of her latest paintings. It was called Peace Dreamer and showed a young girl lying naked, surrounded by whiteness. The word "peace" was written in Korean at the bottom.

Ms. Gavanski-Zissis' work was again shared with the diplomatic community this year for International Women's Day at an event hosted by Serbian chargé d'affaires Mirjana Šešum-Curčić on March 5 at her embassy. Ms. Šešum-Curčić said it was a time to celebrate women's economic, political and social achievements.

This year, Ms. Gavanski-Zissis revealed a different kind of painting, one of "an extraordinary woman" that she found inspired her. She researched and chose Milica (known as Tsarina Milica), wife of Lazar Hrebeljanović (known as Tsar Lazar), who ruled during the Serbian Empire in the 1300s.

"His wife advised him on all matters from the very beginning and he became a great tsar beloved by the Serbian people," read Ms. Gavanski-Zissis' speech from March 5.

Tsarina Milica ruled for a period after her husband was killed.

"[I] discovered what an amazing woman she was and all that she had to endure," Ms. Gavanski-Zissis said.

The painter herself is of Serbian descent. She was born in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, moved to Canada as a child, and returned to the region to study art in Belgrade, Serbia.

The Serbian ruler later became a nun and a saint.

"I painted her, the dream and the transformation from queen to saint," Ms. Gavanski-Zissis said. "The gold of her crown dispersing and becoming a halo, her gown changing and her expression pensive, thinking of all that she had to do."

sduggal@embassynews.ca

[@snehduggal](https://twitter.com/snehduggal)