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IN THE STUDIO WITH NOTMAN, AN EXHIBITION OF ARTIST IN RESIDENCE MARISA PORTOLESE

Montreal, May 22, 2018 – As part of its Artist-in-Residence program launched in 2012, the McCord Museum is presenting *In the Studio with Notman*, an exhibition by photographer Marisa Portolese, **from May 25, 2018, to February 10, 2019**. Inspired by Portolese's research on the Museum's Notman collection, the 16 large-scale colour portraits of women were taken with an analog view camera using natural light. H el ene Samson, the McCord Museum's Curator, Photography, curated the exhibition.

"Marisa Portolese was already familiar with the photographs of William Notman (1826-1891), specifically his portraits, having worked with them in 2016 as part of her series *Belle de Jour III: Dialogues with Notman's Portraits of Women*, a conversation between Victorian portraits and contemporary portraits. We therefore felt it was only natural to invite her to participate in a residency so she could continue this dialogue between two such different eras," notes Suzanne Sauvage, President and Chief Executive Officer of the McCord Museum.

For years, Marisa Portolese has been taking portraits of women she knows personally, always from a feminist perspective. As the Museum's Artist in Residence, she wanted to study the decors of traditional studio photography, where backdrops and props are used to showcase female subjects within a confined space. She sees the studio decor as kind of a second figure in the composition, playing a primary aesthetic function rather than illusionistic. Finding inspiration in the sets created by Notman, she roots her photographic portraits in a pictorial tradition borrowed from art history and indulges her love for painting. Like Notman, the artist also photographed children, mothers and older women. While the decors might evoke the Victorian era, the sensuality of these portraits and the rich colours, vitality and opulence of the floral motifs clearly convey the personal vision of Marisa Portolese.

The exhibition is accompanied by a bilingual publication, *Marisa Portolese – In the Studio with Notman / Dans le studio avec Notman*, published by the McCord Museum with the financial assistance of Concordia University's Faculty of Fine Arts and the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art. This book elucidates the artist's approach, presenting the sources of inspiration behind her portraits, the decors built specifically for each model, and the numerous similarities between women from different eras.

Activities offered in conjunction with the exhibition

On Wednesday, September 19, at 6:00 pm, the public is invited to a talk (in English) about the exhibition. In conversation with photographer Marisa Portolese, curator H el ene Samson will discuss this series of portraits of women inspired by the archives of William Notman, notably with regard to the decors and the composition. In addition, **on Wednesday, October 17, at 6:00 pm**, the Photobook Club - Montreal will present a round table discussion (bilingual) about photography books from the perspective of portraiture and the female vision in photography (space is limited, reservations mandatory, online at eventbrite.ca as of September 2018).

The Artist-in-Residence program

This program invites artists to take a critical and conceptual look at the McCord Museum's collection, reflecting on the connections between their artistic practices and the artefacts and stories they uncover during their research. At the end of each residency, the artist presents a solo exhibition of works created for the occasion. As part of this research-oriented creative



Marisa Portolese, *Chlo e Rafaela Rondon*, 2018.
  Marisa Portolese



Marisa Portolese, *Jinyoung Kim*, 2018.   Marisa Portolese



Marisa Portolese, *Hanna Bozovi *, 2018.   Marisa Portolese

activity, artists are encouraged to communicate their own interpretation of the collection and propose new ways of illuminating history in its many forms.

Marisa Portolese

Born in 1969, Marisa Portolese is a Montreal artist of Italian descent. A graduate of Concordia University's MFA program in 2001, she is now an Associate Professor of Photography in the Faculty of Fine Arts. Her practice includes photography, video and curatorial work.

Portraiture, representations of women, narrative, autobiography and the figure in nature are major and recurrent subjects in her work. She often produces large-scale colour photographs rich in painterly references, which focus on elucidating facets of human experience in psychological and physical environments. Referencing larger themes of identity and spectatorship, she attempts to weave together gesture, affect, and the nuances of the gaze to create an immersive and emotional landscape for the viewer.

Since 2002, Portolese has produced a number of photographic projects for exhibition or publication: *Belle de Jour I, II, III* (2002-2016), *Un chevreuil à la fenêtre de ma chambre* (2003), *The Recognitions* (2004-2005), *The Dandy Collection* (2008), *Imagined Paradise* (2010) and *Antonia's Garden* (2011). She is the recipient of several awards along with numerous grants from the Canada and Québec Arts Councils, and the Du Maurier Arts Foundation.

About the McCord Museum

The McCord Museum is the museum of all Montrealers, a social history museum that celebrates life in Montreal, both past and present—its history, its people, and its communities. Open to the city and the world, the Museum presents exciting exhibitions, educational programming and cultural activities that offer a contemporary perspective on history, engaging visitors from Montreal, Canada and beyond. It is home to over 1.5 million artefacts that make up one of the largest historical collections in North America, comprising Dress, Fashion and Textiles, Photography, Indigenous Cultures, Paintings, Prints and Drawings, Decorative Arts, and Textual Archives. **McCord Museum: Our People, Our Stories.**

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Interviews possible with Suzanne Sauvage, President and Chief Executive Officer of the McCord Museum, Hélène Samson, Curator, Photography, and Marisa Portolese, photographer and Artist in Residence.

Photographs available at <http://ow.ly/R4Fx30jZzsC>

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Royal Photo, the Marsan School of Professional Photography and the Montreal's Italian Week festival are partners of the exhibition *Marisa Portolese – In the Studio with Notman*.

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