

LETTER TO CANADA / LETTRE AU CANADA / CARTA A CANADA

By Maria Luisa de Villa Merrifield, Canada Day. July 1st, 2020, Image: *A very Canadian Image*. Oil on canvas

On Canada Day, I think back to the journey from my Mexico City Tonatiuh sun, and arrival at Pearson International Airport during a mighty snow storm in April of 1961. I was welcomed to Canada by an immigration officer who gave me a landed immigrant status ID card. This was the beginning of a new life with Wyman James Merrifield, my handsome and gentle Canadian husband. In the following years, I would learn about Canadians.



Their generous spirit and strong tradition of volunteering time and knowledge in service of the community we all live in, a beautiful concept known as “tequio” in the Indigenous communities in Mexico. I would learn about the Canadian organizational skills and genuine, firm, but gentle approach to all things and, about the regal Red Mountie iconic figure that once attended my art exhibition, courtesy of the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City.

I think about times of change, when amidst controversy, the Social Health System that today benefits everyone in Canada, first introduced in Saskatchewan by Tommy Douglas, would be adopted by all provinces. The Union Jack was being replaced by a red maple leaf as Canada’s national flag. Times when once again, the Indigenous people reclaimed their rightful place as First Nations, and French Canadians would remind us that Canada has two official languages, human rights would be embraced, and a good looking, intellectual leader

named Pierre Elliot Trudeau, would lead us to become a global example of a multicultural society. But, that first day in Canada, during the drive north to Sudbury, Ontario, through what seemed to be a never ending image of snow covered forests, that was surely breathtaking.

On Canada Day, I reflect on it’s unique capacity to embrace all cultures and all voices and its resilience and togetherness in times of uncertainty such as we are experiencing today. I think of the extraordinary experience of being enveloped by an enormous Aurora Borealis one magical night on Highway 17 North; the vastness of the land and majestic forest cathedrals of Canada as I see them; the 250,000 sweet water lakes in Ontario alone, five of which seem like seas. I think of the joy of picking wild blueberries in Northern Ontario with our four children and about the beautiful image of the migratory Monarch butterfly path that bridges my two habitats. I think about how my love of drawing from nature, led me to explore the wonders of Manitoulin Island, the shoreline of the formidable body of water that is Lake Superior and the golden land we call Yukon. I think about the Canadian First Nations whose presence and cultures confirm a very old and rich Canadian history and with whom I connected instantly, as the ‘pueblos originarios’ also inhabit Mexico and all of the Americas. I think about the contribution to Canada by so many of the world’s peoples, by Mexican Canadians and Mexican migrant workers who leave families and country sometimes risking their lives, to work in the fields of Canada bringing food to our tables. I think of Private Rafael Rodriguez, the Mexican Canadian soldier who fought for Canada in World War I and lies buried in Canadian soil. I think of Canadians’ love of nature, their rich English literary heritage and tradition of gardening, and yes, the art of painting the landscape through artists such as: Thomson, Milne, Kenojuak, Morriseau, Pien, Monkman, Carr and Carl Beam.

It comes as no surprise then, that the beautiful design of the Canadian flag, features the sole image of a red maple leaf in the centre of a snow white field flanked by two red bars, as a patriotic icon that signifies Canadianess. It alludes to nature, as does the small red poppy flower, another icon in the collective imagery of Canadians. It resonates with simplicity and elegance characteristic of the Canadian personality, and with the layers of natural and cultural history of the land itself as the source of national identity, this nation we call Canada, the land that carries the scent of sweet grass, the land of the red maple leaf.