

Diplomacy This Week



Embassy Photo: Sneh Duggal

Bosnia-Herzegovina Ambassador Biljana Gutic-Bjelica with artist Marina Gavanski-Zissis in front of her work, *Cosmic Fire Dancer*, at Ottawa City Hall on March 7.

The art of women



SNEH DUGGAL
Chatter House

She's sensual, intellectual, and emotional. She is a woman.

Those are the ways artist **Marina Gavanski-Zissis** describes the subjects of many of her paintings.

Sitting inside Ottawa City Hall on March 7, the Montreal-based artist points to one of her paintings, called *Cosmic Fire Dancer*.

It shows a young woman spinning fire as a gymnast would twirl a long ribbon. The woman is also at the centre of the universe.

"It shows the woman's power, beauty, grace," Ms. Gavanski-Zissis said.

"I find that as a woman, I paint a woman from a different aspect."

On a table across the room is a portrait she painted of **Biljana Gutic-Bjelica**, the ambassador of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Ms. Gutic-Bjelica hosted the reception that evening in honour of International Women's Day, which people across the globe marked on March 8.

The event featured Ms. Gavanski-Zissis' *Colours of a Woman* exhibit.

The artist described the show as a journey through life.

Another painting showed a man and woman looking at each other. Ms. Gavanski-Zissis said they were looking at their future and their dreams.

She pointed to another of a bride.

"She's escaping the past and going towards the future and happiness," she said.

Her latest painting was called *Peace Dreamer*, and showed a young girl lying down naked, surrounded by whiteness.

The word "peace" is written in Korean at the bottom.

Ms. Gavanski-Zissis, who was born in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, related the painting to her country, which faced a civil war in the 1990s.

"As a woman she paints from a specific feminine, feminist and maternal perspective," wrote **Milomir Niketic**, a correspondent with BETA news agency, a wire service based in Belgrade, in an essay.

"She is a painter with all the human experience of a woman."

Speaking to the crowd of more than 50 people on March 7, **Nikola Miscevic**, a Canadian originally from the former Yugoslavia who currently lives in

Montenegro, read two poems he wrote.

The first was devoted to his seven-year-old daughter **Sara**, and the second was to **Queen Nefertiti**.

"All this trying to confirm how important the beauty of a woman is and how meaningless we are without this beauty, physically and spiritually," Mr. Miscevic said.

Ms. Gutic-Bjelica said the day was very important in her country, and throughout Europe.

"They buy presents, they buy flowers, kids make small presents for their mothers and their teachers...it is really hugely celebrated," Ms. Gutic-Bjelica said.

She noted the importance of promoting gender equality and women's rights, because there are still places where women are not considered equal to men.

She said there are around 20 female ambassadors in Ottawa, by far the minority.

The elegantly dressed ambassador shared with *Chatter House* her message to her eight-year-old daughter Una: never to accept "no" as an answer and "you can't because you're a woman."

Also joining the festivities that evening were Palestinian delegation head **Said Hamad**, Cameroonian High Commissioner **Anu'a-Gheyle Solomon Azoh-Mbi**, Jamaican High Commissioner **Sheila Sealy-Monteith**, Rwandan Ambassador **Edda Mukabagwiza**, **Manfred Auster**, head of the political and public affairs section of the European Union delegation, and Ottawa Mayor **Jim Watson**.