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Area's first international women's day celebration set for March

Sheila Rayam
Female Audience Editor

Jamie Columbus encountered phenomenal women during her travels to 32 countries — women whose spirit she has tried to capture through her art.

But the painter and photographer wanted to do more to honor those women.

"I have for many years dreamt of paying tribute to the spirit, strength and perseverance of the courageous women I have photographed and painted in Africa, Asia, South America and the Middle East," says Columbus of Brighton. "I have always felt fulfilled and enriched by multicultural environments and want to share that experience and make people aware of the diversity in our hometown."

In March, Columbus' dream is set to become a reality with the area's first International Women's Day Celebration, open to the public, at Rochester Contemporary Art Center.

International Women's Day, which has been celebrated since the early 1900s, is a global day of inspiration and recognition of the accomplishments of women. International Women's Day is an official holiday in 14 countries.

A committee of 20 local women, representing numerous ethnic backgrounds, has put together the event featuring various cuisines, music and dance, blessings from diverse spiritual leaders, a Peace Offering Ceremony conducted by 5-year-old girls from Trinity Montessori School and more.

"I think it's important for us to celebrate the contributions that women make and also to improve the situation for women," says Rhona Genzel, director of the English Language Center at Rochester Institute of Technology.

Along with the activities planned for the event, guests will have the opportunity to view Columbus' "Earth Tones Woman" at Rochester Contemporary Art Center.

The installation is a mosaic of photographs and oil pastels of tribal women that Columbus met during her many trips. "Earth Tones Woman" is scheduled to open Feb. 6 and run through March 15.

Here at home, members of the Rochester International Women's Day committee hope the event will be a "virtual passport" to women from other countries as well as a chance to experience and learn more about different cultures locally.

"I'm hoping people will walk away with a good feeling about their experience and a better understanding of different cultures," says Columbus, who adds that the day should be fun, too.

Anyone interested in volunteering to help with Rochester International Women's Day can contact Columbus at Jamie@JamieColumbus.com. The committee also hopes to become community partners with grassroots organizations, cultural groups and corporations to help Rochester International Women's Day grow.

"The events that day are just really the starting point for the celebration," says committee member Judith Weinstein, executive director of Rochester International Council. "We're hoping to have many other events going on, sponsored by other organizations during the month surrounding International Women's Day."

For more information about Rochester International Women's Day, go to www.RIWD.org.

Additional Facts

Honoring women home and abroad

The first International Women's Day Celebration is scheduled for 1 to 3:30 p.m. March 8 at Rochester Contemporary Art Center, 137 East Ave. Activities will include ethnic food, music and dance. Admission is free. For more information, go to www.RIWD.org.
