

Arts · Art Hurts

## Marigold Santos is reconnecting with her Filipinx roots — through tattooing

When she first immigrated to Canada, she lost touch with her culture. But now, identity is what empowers her

[Lise Hosein](#) · CBC Arts · Posted: Mar 07, 2019 6:15 PM ET | Last Updated: March 7, 2019



*This is part six of [Art Hurts](#), a new CBC Arts digital series [now streaming on CBC Gem](#), that focuses on eight of the game-changers in the Canadian tattoo landscape. And they're all female-identifying or gender non binary. Just saying, guys.*

Filipinx-Canadian artist [Marigold Santos](#) has been working to turn some of the most magical elements of her roots in the Philippines into tattoos. They look like drawings, inky or sketchy in black or grey, because that's what they're based on — Santos includes tattoos as only part of her larger art practice. She thinks of the brush and ink on paper as a reflection of needle and ink on skin.

Now based in Montreal, Santos immigrated to Canada when she was seven, first to Scarborough and then to Calgary for her formative years. Back then, she was very eager to be Canadian, and she stopped speaking her mother tongue. But as she got older, it was her Filipinx identity that began to feed into the content of her artwork. And now, it's that identity that's most empowering for her.

In this video made by filmmaker [Nika Khanjani](#), you get a glimpse into Santos's process in her own studio in Montreal and as she receives a tattoo from an artist for whom she holds great respect. And you'll find out how tattooing connects her back to her roots.



(CBC Arts)

Santos doesn't use traditional designs in her tattoos, instead representing her heritage through drawings of characters from folklore from the Philippines. This includes the [Aswang](#) — a flesh-eating, shapeshifting monster. She uses the scary figure to talk about empowerment of identity and self: the Aswang was originally described as a strong shamanic woman, but colonialism transformed her into a monster. So Santos brings the Aswang back to her origins and uses it as a force of re-empowerment. (By the way, Marigold Santos, I want one.)

Santos will be in Edmonton until April, teaching. But you can get on her waiting list in Montreal [here](#) for when she gets back.

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