



## Innovative Multi-Media Touring Exhibition to Open at Les Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens on June 1, 2017

Watch the Trailer: <http://bit.ly/1TvSpWw>

**Alexander Reford, Director of Les Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens, Québec, is pleased to announce the production of new boldly innovative multi-media exhibition WAR FLOWERS.**

**WAR FLOWERS**, curated by **Viveka Melki**, is a multi-platform, multi-sensory exhibition that will provide visitors with a unique, immersive experience. The essence of the exhibition is humanity's unfailing ability to find beauty even amidst the horrors of war. If war is a story we are doomed to repeat, **WAR FLOWERS** invites us to consider that innocence and hope are its eternal partners. The exhibition draws on personal letters, exhibited here for the first time, sent by Lt Col. George Stephen Cantlie from the battlefields of World War I to his wife and children at home in Canada. Each letter included a flower; poppies from Flanders and daisies from the Somme, that Cantlie picked from a fields and gardens of war-torn Belgium and France and pressed between the pages of affectionate notes to his young daughter, Celia. Using the floriography of each flower to illustrate an aspect of human nature, this exhibition tells the story of humanity and human nature; the horror of war has only ever been kept at bay by the elements of "love", "grace", "courage", "memory"...

Each element is linked to a Canadian of the Great War era who encapsulated these characteristics through their story. Amongst others, John McCrae, Georges Vanier, Elsie Reford, Talbot Papineau, A.Y. Jackson and Percival Molson, Julia Drummond, Frank Meighen, Edward Savage and Geroge Stephen Cantlie. The links to these individuals, and their own personal keepsakes and mementoes from the period, provide diverse perspectives on the Canadian contribution to the war effort.

Following its exhibition at Les Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens, **WAR FLOWERS** will tour to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa (October 1-December 2017), the New Visitor Education Centre at the Canadian National Memorial in Vimy, France (April 1-June 2018), and the Château Ramezay – Historic Site and Museum in Montréal (July 1-December 2018).

« **WAR FLOWERS** is a unique opportunity to illustrate the many ways in which World War I transformed the lives of the combatants and their families,” said Les Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens director Alexander Reford. “It is an especially poignant exhibition for us because it allows us to unite Elsie Reford and her cousin George Stephen Cantlie, whose lives and letters are an important part of this story. Like all mothers of soldiers, Elsie Reford followed the war with anxiety and despair. She was spared the grief of many parents but soon after the close of the war, she made a pilgrimage to the battlefields of Europe to see for herself where her friend Talbot Papineau had lost his life. This exhibition is bold in its creativity and finds new and unique ways to tell our history.”

**WAR FLOWERS** curator **Viveka Melki** designed the exhibition not only from her previous work with history in film, but from her ability to recognize the human characteristics that attach us to a story. Her work shows an intimate understanding of human nature, “*the focus of the exhibition is to leave an indelible memory for those who pass through its narrative,*” says Melki.

The core of **WAR FLOWERS** is born from collaborative creation across various artistic disciplines. Melki has assembled a strong creative team of artists, chosen for their boldness of vision and their understanding that it is a profound sense of the creative process that makes for memorable experiences. **Mark Raynes Roberts**, the creator of the ten optical crystal sculptures that will be featured in the exhibition, has built an international reputation as a crystal artist from his studio in Toronto. **Alexandra Bachand** is the Magog-based olfactory specialist whose task it is to capture memory...in scent! **Céline Arsenault**, with over thirty years experience as the librarian of the Montréal Botanical Garden has overseen the conservation of the fragile 100 year-old flowers. **Normand Dumont** is the exhibition’s designer who will merge the creative vision of the curator into a unique experience for visitors to each of the venues.

“The Canadian War Museum is delighted to present **War Flowers** in October 2017”, said Stephen Quick, Director General of the Canadian War Museum. “This exhibition will offer Museum visitors a unique and multi-sensory experience of personal stories of the First World War. This exhibition ties in well with our ongoing efforts to mark the centenary of the war which did so much to shape Canada and Canadians.”

**WAR FLOWERS** is produced by Les Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens and made possible with a grant the government of Canada from the Museums Assistance Program – Access to Heritage of Canadian Heritage and private support from the Molson Foundation, the Zeller Family Foundation, the St. Andrew’s Society of Montreal and many individual donors.

A National Historic Site and Québec heritage site, Les Jardins de Métis / Reford Gardens are an obligatory stop for all those visiting eastern Québec. Cultural space and tourist destination for over 50 years, the Reford Gardens is one of the largest gardens in Canada, providing visitors with experiences for every sense. Located on the banks of the St. Lawrence and Mitis rivers, they were created between 1926 and 1958 by avid gardener and plant collector, Elsie Reford. Consult [www.refordgardens.com](http://www.refordgardens.com) for more information.

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## **ABOUT CURATOR VIVEKA MELKI**



**WAR FLOWERS** curator Viveka Melki is a Canadian filmmaker and screenwriter. She has worked and travelled in cultures where repressive regimes are dominant. From these experiences are born her projects around conflict - and the capacity of the human spirit for resilience. Reflecting on the subject of war, she says: *"I dislike war because it runs in our blood and then our blood runs. I am confused by wars now because it's not clear anymore who the enemy is. War seems to be a struggle in grey. I hate war because my daughter is likely to know it one day, and all I can do is teach her to be brave, and to love so that when it happens - again - she will remember what life was before ...War."* Born in The Gambia, West Africa of Brazilian/Lebanese descent, and educated in the UK before immigrating to Canada Melki sees the world through a multi-cultural lens. In 2014, she directed the two-part series *War Correspondence* (Radio- Canada, RDI). Her most recent production, the feature-length documentary *After Circus (2015)*, received acclaim after screenings at several North American film festivals, including *Hot Docs* in Toronto, and the *Rencontres Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal*. It

has been chosen to screen at the prestigious Sunny Side of the Doc Festival in La Rochelle, France, in late June 2016. It will have its broadcast premiere in Canada on CBC's documentary Channel on Sunday, June 12, 2016 at 9 pm ET/10 pm PT. Viveka is in production on a new documentary, *Carricks* (2017, Radio-Canada & RDI), on Irish immigration to Canada in 1847 and its link to Francophone culture. She is also developing *We Interrupt This Program*, a feature documentary about radio and social change around the world, for CBC's documentary Channel. <http://vivekamelki.com/>