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### **Large-Scale Portraits at MAM Highlight Ongoing Struggle for Equality**

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Missoula-based artist Kristi Hager began making large-scale portraits of the woman in her life in 2018. “I started with my great grandmother, mother, goddaughter, friends, and a hero,” she said. The series now spans more than 20 pieces, which she painted on large sheets of thin, cotton scrim. *Kristi Hager: Equal: A Work in Progress* opens at the Missoula Art Museum on September 29.

The portraits, named after the initials of the subject, are 5 feet long by 4 feet tall. The pieces hang from the ceiling and cause the viewer to confront the artwork directly. The title of the exhibit references the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which ensures equal legal rights to all American citizens regardless of sex. Though the ERA was passed by the House of Representatives in 1971 and the Senate in 1972, it has yet to be ratified into law. “I thought it [the Equal Rights Amendment] would be ratified in my lifetime, but it continues to be a work in progress,” said the artist. “Full equality is the work of lifetimes...This exhibition is a work in progress because I intend to paint many more portraits,” she continued.

This exhibition takes place during 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment, which granted women the right to vote in the United States, though many demographics remained disenfranchised. During a year of social and political turmoil, *Equal: A Work in Progress* is a reminder that the struggle for economic, social, and political equality is ongoing for many Americans. Senior Curator Brandon Reintjes says, “The centenary of the passage of the 19th Amendment and the Equal Rights Amendment are the two separate, but interrelated issues. MAM felt compelled to host this extraordinary exhibition by Hager because it offers an unparalleled opportunity to commemorate a milestone of democracy and to explore its relevance to the issues of equal rights today.”

*Kristi Hager: Equal, A Work in Progress* is on view at the Missoula Art Museum from September 29, 2020 through February 20, 2021.

**About MAM:** Founded in 1975 and accredited by the American Association of Museums since 1987, MAM is emerging as the leading contemporary art museum in the Intermountain West. MAM is situated on the traditional, ancestral territories of the Séliš (Salish or “Flathead”) and Q̓lispé (upper Kalispel or Pend d’Oreille) peoples. MAM is committed to respecting the indigenous stewards of the land it occupies. Their rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Montana and to the work of MAM. MAM is a fully accessible, free public museum boasting eight exhibition spaces, a library, and education center in the heart of Missoula’s historic downtown.

**If you would like more information about this topic, please call Brandon Reintjes at 406.728.0447 or email [brandon@missoulaartmuseum.org](mailto:brandon@missoulaartmuseum.org).**

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