



### **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ** *Artist, Serbia [1946 – alive]*

She is renowned as the world's most celebrated performance artist. Born to parents who were partisans, she embarked on her artistic journey by enrolling in the Marina Academy of Fine Arts, successfully graduating in the year 1970. It was during her time at the academy that she initiated the development of a wholly unique artistic trajectory, one deeply rooted in the artistry of the human body, a theme that would perpetually occupy the core of her artistic poetics. Throughout her illustrious career, she gained fame for her notable artistic performances, some of which were created in collaboration with the artist Ulay. Together, they shared not only an artistic partnership but also a personal connection, further enhancing the depth and impact of their endeavors.

### **ALICE BALL** *Chemist, USA [1892-1916]*

The pioneering individual who attained the distinction of being the first African American to obtain a master's degree from the University of Hawaii, is celebrated for her remarkable contribution to medical science. She achieved renown for her development of an injectable extract designed for the treatment of leprosy, which proved to be efficacious and remained in use until the mid-2000s. Alice's career was abruptly cut short at the age of 24. She succumbed to an ailment that she contracted during her research. Alice Ball's accomplishments remained unrecognized for an extended period. It was not until the year 2000 that the University of Hawaii accorded her the recognition she so richly deserved. Today, throughout the islands of Hawaii, the 29th of February is observed as "Alice Ball Day".

### **LAKSHMI BAI** *Queen and warrior, India [1828 - 1858]*

She was renowned as the Queen of Jhansi and emerged as the indomitable leader of the 1857 Indian revolt against British colonial rule. In an era when the rigid caste system profoundly influenced life in India, she was known as "Little Manu" who was able to display a remarkable aptitude for military strategy and to distinguish herself as an exceptional horsewoman. Her participation in the pivotal battles that ultimately paved the way for India's independence marks a significant chapter in the nation's history. Even today, her memory endures as a revered national heroine, her legacy is celebrated through numerous literary works, musical compositions, and televised portrayals.

### **COCO CHANEL** *Fashion Designer, France [1883 - 1971]*

Through her groundbreaking contributions to the realm of fashion, she orchestrated a profound transformation in the very essence of femininity and elegance. Her innovations, including the adoption of short hair, the iconic black sheath dress, and the eponymous perfume, stand as enduring example. She embarked on her career by crafting hats, ultimately ascending to the status of a globally recognized and revered entrepreneur. Her legacy is further illuminated by her remarkable and celebrated aphorisms, which consistently exude wit, insight, and irony. Among her most renowned motto is the timeless proclamation: "Fashion may come and go, but style endures." She also imparted invaluable sartorial wisdom with her wise counsel: "Before you go out, look in the mirror and take something off."

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### **SAMANTHA CRISTOFORETTI *Astronaut, Italy* [1977 - alive]**

She is the first Italian woman to go into space and with the longest stay on the same mission, more than 7 months, setting the European and female records for time in space in a single flight. First European woman to lead the International Space Station. Famous are his updates with anecdotes and photos from the trip, spread on social media under the signature AstroSam, a pseudonym given by her fans.

### **MARIE CURIE *Scientist, Poland* [1867 - 1934]**

Since Poland does not allow girls to study higher education, she moved to France and attended the Sorbonne University. She is the first woman awarded the Nobel Prize. She receives it for physics thanks to her studies on radiation. She later also received the Nobel Prize for chemistry for having discovered radium and polonium, whose name was chosen in honor of her native land. She chooses to make the results of her research available to everyone for free.

### **TAMARA DE LEMPICKA *Painter, Poland* [1898 - 1980]**

Icon of art-deco, one the most important artists of the 1900s. The protagonists of her paintings are women. Symbol of female emancipation in the world, her art revolutionizes femininity. Fascinating and scandalous, she portrays herself in the famous "Self-portrait in the Bugatti". Many of her works are collected by the pop star Madonna. As a true nonconformist, she said: "I live life in the margins of society, and the rules of normal society don't apply to those who live on the fringe."

### **AMELIA EARHART *Aviator, USA* [1897 - 1937]**

From her initial experience as a passenger aboard a biplane, she was instantaneously captivated by the realm of aviation, in which she would later emerge as a pioneer. To fund her flying lessons, she diligently undertook a diverse range of occupations, ultimately becoming a student of the esteemed Anita Snook, one of the world's pioneering female aviators. As the inaugural woman to conquer the Atlantic Ocean by air, she has, ever since, held the esteemed title of "New Queen of the Skies" in the hearts of all. Her notorious quote, "Courage is the toll that life exacts for granting us peace" became widely celebrated and continue to inspire countless individuals.

### **ROSE FORTUNE *Businesswoman and Policewoman, USA/Canada* [1774 - 1864]**

She is known for her entrepreneurial abilities at a time when neither women nor blacks were encouraged to do business. Born to slave parents during the American Revolution, she emigrated to Canada at seven years old. As an adult she founded a luggage company and created an alert service to warn of departing ships. Her reliability, honesty and constant presence on the waterfront lead her to be charged with safeguarding property and maintaining order on the piers and warehouses of Annapolis Royal, acting as a police officer on the city's waterfront.



## **ROSALIND FRANKLIN *Scientist, USA [1920 - 1958]***

A brilliant crystallographer and pioneer in X-ray diffraction, her contribution to the discovery of DNA in 1953 was crucial. When the continuation of this study was prohibited, her attention shifted to carbon, laying the foundation for virology. Today she is recognized as one of the most important scientists of the 20th century.

## **MARY KATHERINE GODDARD *Publisher, USA [1738 - 1816]***

She worked with his brother, publisher of a revolutionary newspaper The Journal Maryland. In 1775, after running the newspaper for some time in her brother's absence, she began printing on it the words, "Published by M.K. Goddard". She is responsible for the second printing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the first with the names of the signers. The following year, she becomes director of the post office, the first woman in all the colonies to assume that role.

## **NADINE GORDIMER *Writer and activist, South Africa [1923 - 2014]***

The distinguished South African writer is not only renowned for her literary accomplishments but also for her unwavering activism against racism and apartheid, as well as her staunch advocacy for equality and the preservation of human rights within her homeland. Notably, she helped Nelson Mandela in crafting his seminal "I am ready to die" speech. Her literary prowess culminated in her being awarded the Booker Prize, followed by the Nobel Prize, a testament to the depth and breadth of her contributions. Her works have been translated into more than 40 languages.

## **KATHARINE GRAHAM *Journalist, USA [1917 - 2001]***

First woman to head a major publishing house, that of the Washington Post in the Watergate years, bought by her father at an auction. Hers the scoop of the Pentagon Papers that greatly damaged the U.S. government. She worked as a journalist at a time when the profession was not common among women. She is called, the most powerful woman in America. Her stories are told in Spielberg's film "The Post." With the book "Personal History" she wins the Pulitzer Prize.

## **MARGHERITA HACK *Astrophysicist, Italy [1922 - 2013]***

She is widely acclaimed as Italy's preeminent astrophysicist, whose contributions have left an unbelievable imprint on the realms of astronomy and physics on a global scale. Notably, she achieved the distinction of being the first woman to assume the directorship of an astronomical observatory in Italy, a position of leadership held at the University of Trieste. Her intellectual pursuits exceeded national borders, and she engaged in fruitful collaborations with esteemed international institutions, including the Institute of Astrophysics in Paris. Throughout her lifetime, she embraced a mantra that resonates: "In life, there is naught to fear, only to comprehend."





### **ZAHA HADID *Architect, Iraq* [1950 – 2016]**

The exuberant British designer is known as the "queen of the curve" for her designs of elegant and overwhelming complexity. She has been commissioned for projects all over the world; she has been awarded the Pritzker Prize and the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Among her projects: the London Aquatics Center for the 2012 Olympics, the Galaxy Soho in Beijing and the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati.

### **RUTH HANDLER *Entrepreneur, USA* [1916 – 2002]**

The youngest of 10 children, who fled Poland and persecution. She became a businesswoman, a pioneer in an era in which society relegated women to the role of housewife. Co-founder of the toy company Mattel, she created Barbie, the doll that was missing: an adult, to imagine themselves as adults. Barbie reflects the changes in society, with over 200 professions embodied and recently also thanks to its film adaptation. In her memoir, she writes: "Barbie has always represented the fact that a woman has choices."

### **SHAMSIA HASSANI *Artist, Afghanistan* [1988 – alive]**

"Art changes people's minds and people change the world". Shamsia, a distinguished artist, holds the titles of both graffiti artist and professor of sculpture at Kabul University. Beginning in the year 2010, she embarked on a journey of street art, adorning the walls of Kabul's streets and houses. This unconventional choice of artistic expression appealed to her due to the cost-effectiveness of spray cans and stencils compared to traditional art supplies. However, the subject matter of her art, which sheds light on the challenges faced by Afghan women, has led to her living in secrecy, concealed from those who would seek to silence her. Tragically, her murals constantly fall victim to the erasure efforts of the authorities.

### **FRIDA KAHLO *Painter, Mexico* [1907 – 1954]**

A symbol of rebellion, Frida Kahlo stands as an iconic figure in the realm of pop culture. She was born to a Hungarian photographer who had immigrated to Mexico. An incident resulting in a severe chest injury compelled her to endure months of convalescence, during which her parents gift her with a canopy bed featuring a mirror affixed to the ceiling. From this point forward, she starts producing self-portraits that were both audacious and surreal. Embracing the cause of the Mexican Communist Party, she marries the acclaimed painter Diego Rivera, positioning herself in proximity to prominent figures within both the artistic and political landscapes of her time. Following her passing, her ashes found their final resting place within her Casa Azul, which now stands as the hallowed repository of the Frida Kahlo Museum.



### **ASMA KHAN *Chef, India - UK [1959 – alive]***

She has since established herself as a prominent figure in the culinary world, currently overseeing the operations of one of London's most esteemed Indian restaurants, the "Darjeeling Express" located in the heart of Soho. Her culinary prowess has earned her the distinction of being the first British chef to be featured on the acclaimed Netflix series "Chef's Table". She is a food writer, distinguished by her specialization in British law and her attainment of a doctoral degree. One of her most commendable endeavours lies in her commitment to empowering migrant women through her restaurant. She extends a warm welcome to these women in her kitchen, providing them with opportunities to develop autonomy and awareness. Her restaurant stands as a symbol of women's empowerment.

### **RITA LEVI-MONTALCINI *Scientist, Italy [1909/2012]***

Born in Turin, she started her academic journey by graduating from medical school. However, the advent of racial laws and the onset of war created unprecedented challenges and adversities in her pursuit of continued research, to the extent that she established a laboratory within the confines of her own bedroom. She mastered the study of the nervous system in the United States. Her groundbreaking discovery of Nf $\kappa$ B, denoting the protein responsible for stimulating nerve cell growth, assumed profound significance in the treatment of debilitating diseases, such as Alzheimer's. She was awarded the Nobel Prize. Her autobiography, bearing the title "In Praise of Imperfection", serves as a testament to her unwavering dedication to scientific excellence and the pursuit of knowledge.

### **ADA LOVELACE BYRON *Mathematician, Great Britain [1815 – 1852]***

She foresaw the foundational concepts of modern computing and artificial intelligence more than a century in advance. As the daughter of the renowned poet Byron, the "Enchantress of Numbers" stands as the very first female programmer in history. Her pursuits encompassed studies that were uncommon for a woman of her era, encompassing calculus, logic, and algebra. She demonstrated the essentiality of the calculating machine conceived by Babbage, and she diligently translated and integrated the text of Turin's esteemed mathematician Menabrea, dedicated precisely to the calculating machine.

### **WANGARI MAATHAI *Environmental activist, Kenya [1940-2011]***

Biologist, committed to the environment and women's rights. She founded Green Belt, a movement created to repopulate the Kenyan territory with trees by teaching local women a trade. Thanks to her work, over 51 million trees have been planted in Kenya and the Green Belt Movement today crosses national borders. Deputy Minister of Environment, she is the first African to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.



### **RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ TUM *Activist, Guatemala [1959 – alive]***

Hailing from a humble peasant family, her journey began with struggle as a farm laborer at the tender age of 8. She emerged as a significant figure in the Peasant Unity Committee, assuming a leadership role pivotal to their cause. However, her commitment to advocating for the recognition of Indigenous rights led to her unfortunate exile, as she faced the consequences of her activism. Her relentless dedication to the cause of social justice and ethno-cultural reconciliation, underpinned by a respect for the rights of indigenous peoples, culminated in the Nobel Peace Prize. This esteemed accolade served as a testament to her efforts in advancing the rights and well-being of communities.

### **MARYAM MIRZAKHANI *Mathematician, Iran [1977 – 2017]***

Having already achieved the distinction of being a high school champion, securing two gold medals in the Mathematics Olympiad, she furthered her academic pursuits by earning her bachelor's degree from Tehran and subsequently attaining her doctorate from Harvard. She etched her name in history by becoming the first woman and the initial individual of Iranian nationality to be honoured with the Fields Medal, an esteemed accolade reserved for mathematicians under the age of 40. A colleague aptly describes her as "she is on a hill, able to see a wider panorama". The date of her birth, May 12, has been commemorated as Mathematics Day.

### **FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE *Nurse, England [1820 – 1910]***

Known as "the lady with the lantern," she is considered the first modern nurse. She gained economic independence with a job as superintendent at a hospital for invalid women in London. A pioneer of the scientific method through statistics, she collaborated in establishing the first field hospitals. May 12, the day of her birth, is celebrated as International Nurses Day.

### **ROSA PARKS *Activist, USA [1913 – 2005]***

She is The Mother of the Civil Rights Movement. From meeting Martin Luther King to embracing Nelson Mandela, she spends her life in the fight against segregation. Dismissal, imprisonment, and death threats did not stop her in her actions to raise awareness of African Americans conditions. Her phrase, "You should never be afraid of what you are doing when you are in the right." The bus on which she did not stand up to seat a white person is preserved at the Henry Ford Museum.



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### **RAPELANG RABANA *Computer scientist and entrepreneur, South Africa/USA [1982 – alive]***

Rapelang Rabana is a South African technology entrepreneur who is making waves both on the African continent and around the world. She established her reputation in the tech sector as the co-founder of Yeigo Communications, a company that gained international recognition for its pioneering innovations in mobile VoIP and IP communications. Today, Rapelang is the innovative founder behind Rekindle Learning, a company looking to improve education in Africa by turning people's compulsion to check their phones into an opportunity to learn. Lionesses of Africa.

### **WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA *Poetess, Poland [1923 – 2012]***

Awarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996, she describes the world through her poetry: the love for small things, for nature, for everyday coincidences, restoring wonder and amazement with an irony that transforms the ordinary world into amazing. Her works are translated into over 30 languages. She describes her poetry like this: "A glance made me more beautiful, and I made this beauty mine."

### **JUNKO Tabei *Mountaineer, Japan [1939 – 2016]***

The first mountaineer to summit Everest. The "Lady of Climbing" is a petite woman, but endowed with immense drive that pushed her to reach the world's highest peaks. Growing up in the harsh years of World War II, she is the first woman to complete the ascent of two 8000-meter peaks and the first to climb Shisha Pangma, and she becomes a mountaineering legend.

### **GERDA TARO *Photographer, Germany [1910 – 1937]***

Photojournalist and war correspondent, she was born into a Jewish family. As a fervent opponent of Nazism, she made the pivotal decision to escape to Paris. Here, she embarked on a collaborative venture with her Hungarian compatriot, Endre Friedman, resulting in the creation of the pseudonymous identity, Robert Capa. Under this nom de guerre, they authored some of the most evocative and poignant photo reports of the Spanish Civil War, encapsulating the tumultuous and harrowing realities of the conflict. Regrettably, Gerda Taro's life was tragically cut short, becoming the first woman journalist to meet her demise on the perilous frontlines of war, an astonishingly young 26 years of age at the time of her passing.

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### **MADAM C.J. WALKER *Entrepreneur, USA [1867 – 1919]***

Her real name is Sarah Breedlove. Born into a family enslaved by circumstances, she endured years of adversity and suffering. Over time, she embarked on a journey of experimentation with home remedies, primarily aimed at addressing the issue of hair loss. Gradually, she meticulously crafted a range of products tailored specifically for the needs of black women. With unwavering determination, she initiated a thriving sales enterprise, concurrently training thousands of young women as sales agents throughout the years. Her endeavor not only introduced her products to a wider audience but also played a significant role in empowering these women to achieve economic independence.

### **XIAN ZHANG *Orchestra Conductor, China [1973 – alive]***

First woman in Europe to be nominated as permanent musical director of an Italian symphony orchestra. Her first appearance was at 19 years old with the direction of the China National Opera Orchestra. Then she joined the New York Philharmonic as a director. Since then, it has been a succession of first times for orchestral conducting, in the world and in Italy, when in 2009 she conducted the Giuseppe Verdi Symphony Orchestra of Milan.