

Art Force 5 partnering with NFL Network in celebration of iconic women

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Alfred University's Art Force 5, a pioneering group of students founded to celebrate equality, creativity, community, history and empathy through art, will unveil next week its newest project, The Women's Empowerment Draft, in tandem with the National Football League's annual draft of college athletes for professional careers.

The Women's Empowerment Draft will highlight the lives of 32 historically significant and iconic women who have contributed to women's rights in the U.S.. A portrait of each woman will adorn an NFL-style jersey, and the jerseys will be worn by 32 college students from across the United States. The pre-recorded production will present each student describing the life and contributions of the woman featured on their jersey – and since the students live in communities across the country, each of their jerseys highlight a woman from their particular region.

New York City native Shirley Chisolm, the first African American woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress, will appear on a jersey highlighted with the colors of the New York Jets. A portrait of Helen Keller, who spent her later years in Easton, Conn., will be on a jersey sporting the colors of the New England Patriots. Rochester native Susan B. Anthony will appear on a Buffalo Bills-colored jersey.

The project has caught the eye of the NFL Network, which covers the annual three-day NFL draft and will broadcast the draft from April 23-25. Lindsay Rhodes, anchor for the NFL Network's flagship program Total Access, will cover the story and make a guest appearance in the draft room, honoring Inez Milholland on behalf of the city of Los Angeles. Millholland, who fought for women's suffrage in the early 20th century, became the movement's martyr when she collapsed during a speech in Los Angeles and later died.

The NFL Network will run its own story on Art Force 5 and the Women's Empowerment Draft. That story is expected to run on NFL Network during the week of April 26, according to Dan Napolitano, Art Force 5 Founder and Assistant Dean of Alfred University's School of Art and Design.

Napolitano, says The Women's Empowerment Draft will feature at least a dozen Alfred University students living around the country in addition to about 20 more students from U.S. colleges and universities that have joined the initiative. Those students were encouraged by their own professors to participate, after Alfred University professors reached out to contact friends and colleagues across the country.

Napolitano notes current members of Art Force 5 researched the lives of the women featured on the jerseys in order to provide content for students who will appear and speak in the Art Force 5 video. The jerseys were designed by Alfred University alumna Jillian Mullen '17 alongside Albany, NY-based designer Courtney Ferrara.

Alfred University alumnus and NFL Creative Director, Trent Cooper will produce the NFL Network segment while the Art Force 5 will edit a 30-minute Women's Empowerment Draft video, which will be released on the Art Force 5 website ([www.artforce5.com](http://www.artforce5.com)). Cooper also directed Art Force 5's tribute to Atlanta's first African-American police force, which was featured on the Emmy award-winning series, NFL 360.

Alfred University student Adeye Jean Baptiste will co-host the 30-minute production (a shorter 30-second version will also be shot). "We've always seen both men and women wearing male athlete names on fan jerseys," Baptiste says. "But to encourage both to wear the names of women is a creative twist worth continuing."

All current members of Art Force 5 are students at Alfred University.