

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS: The MHC Gallery's budget is met primarily through private, tax deductible donations. Please, help keep the gallery alive and growing. Make cheques payable to: MHC Gallery. Mail to: MHC Gallery, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4. Credit card donations, contact Connie Wiebe at cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca. (204) 888 6781; Online at <https://gallery.mennonitechurch.ca/donate>
Ray Dirks, curator, rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

WE ARE YOUR FUTURE

Creativity and resilience among women weavers in Tlamacazapa, Mexico

ALEJANDRO ARANDA/RAY DIRKS

WITH THE WOMEN WEAVERS OF PALM

OPENING

Friday, September 9, 7:30PM

Welcome six visitors from the states of Morelos and Guerrero including artist Alejandro Aranda and Indigenous weavers from Tlamacazapa

Public Presentation

Monday, September 12, 7:00PM

"The long haul: the building of creativity and resilience in a troubled Mexican village"

Gallery (and artist) Statement

A decade ago Ruth Wiens attended a gallery opening. She'd been directed to me by the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Ruth explained that she and her husband, David, volunteered with Atzin Mexico each winter in Tlamacazapa, a remote Indigenous community in the mountains of Guerrero State. Ruth had photos of etchings based on the lives of Tlamacazapa's women by Alejandro Aranda. She asked if the MHC Gallery might be interested in showing the prints. The artworks were not only good pieces of art, they were important statements revealing the struggles and dignity of the women.

I was definitely interested.

We agreed to feature Aranda's etchings. Then, we commissioned him to create artworks for the touring *Just Food* exhibition.

Before we had met, Ruth had given a copy of the *Focus on Africa* cookbook, to which I had donated images of my paintings, to Atzin director Dr. Susan Smith. Soon after Ruth brought Aranda to my attention, Susan contacted me suggesting Atzin, Aranda and I work together.

A few years passed. In 2013 Susan sent me an e-mail. "We have a grant for you to come to Mexico." In late 2013 I traveled to Cuernavaca, where Atzin's office is located, and Tlamacazapa. I was honoured to spend time with the women who take part in Atzin's programming, attend workshops and tutoring sessions. I watched weavers and heard stories. I walked together with Aranda throughout the community with young women delivering vitamins and medication to people too old or too sick to leave their homes.

In 2014, Aranda and I began to create artworks for our part of



the *We Are Your Future* exhibition.

The exhibition, which also includes palm weaving by various women led by Rufina Fermin Procopio, toured in Mexico and is now beginning its Canadian tour in Winnipeg. Six visitors from Mexico will attend the opening and the public presentation on the following Monday evening. Please, join us and welcome these fine people, watch weaving demonstrations, marvel at Aranda's art, hear the story of Atzin, see watercolours I have created. Get to know the women of Tlamacazapa. Stand with them through supporting the work of Atzin. *Ray Dirks*

Exhibition Statement from Atzin Mexico

Dr. Susan Smith

(for more information go to <http://gallery.mennonitechurch.ca/node/138>)

The *We are your Future* art exhibition portrays the daily reality of women weavers of palm who live in acute poverty in Tlamacazapa, Mexico. These Indigenous weavers are caught in a complex web of social disintegration and environmental toxicity with water shortage. Today, they are re-creating a sense of worth and identity through a re-weaving of their perceptions of themselves and of their strengths. Seventy high quality palm weavings accompany thirty original paintings and prints, done by two artists, Alejandro Aranda from Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico and Ray Dirks from Winnipeg. Each artist captured different dimensions of village life and illustrated the essence of development with dignity.

The Village in Mexico

In the arid and rocky mountains of northern Guerrero in the south of Mexico, the 6,200 Nahua villagers of Tlamacazapa earn a meager

living by weaving palm baskets, an ancient art form preserved over centuries. Boys gather the palm which grows wild and carry it home. A skilled weaver, working steadily, can make a large basket in three or four days. Men and boys sell their baskets for a few pesos on the streets throughout Mexico. Corn is their main food and in Tlamacazapa, families farm or buy corn and cook on a large *comal* over a *tlecuil*, an open three-stone fire. Most families eat twice a day. People gather firewood in the surrounding forests, carrying heavy loads of wood strapped to their backs. The villagers have serious problems with sanitation and with the quantity, quality and economy of their water. Laboratory studies reveal toxic metals like lead and arsenic in their water, soil, chemical palm dyes and glazed clay cooking pots. Especially among malnourished people, this long-term exposure

to low levels of harmful metals causes a toxic synergy, producing a silent crisis of slow poisoning and poor health. Village women of all ages are gradually re-weaving their suffering into lives of greater substance by nurturing their creativity and resilience — two vital characteristics of a transformed life.

Background

This exhibition is a continuation of two previous exhibitions organized by Atzin that toured in Mexico and Canada. The first, *Re-weaving a Life*, was an exhibition of art and palm that focused on the context of Tlamacazapa and toured in both Mexico and Canada (2006-2008). The second, *Tlamacazapa: Weavers of Life* was a photographic exhibition that captured the work and lives of women weavers, by Rodrigo Cruz and Rufina Fermín Procopio (2010-2013), and toured in Mexico.

We are your Future in Mexico (2013-2016)

Alejandro Aranda and Ray Dirks travelled to Tlamacazapa, Guerrero where they spent time in the village, meeting with the women, touring the village and gathering materials (photographs, sketches, interviews) in preparation for their art work. Artists and weavers worked closely together in Mexico from December 1st-9th 2013 and then returned to their respective homes to complete their art for the exhibition. The weavers prepared for the artists' visits by participating in several reflection circles prior to the artists' arrival. The weavers discussed positive changes in their lives and identified critical elements of these changes — the "what, how, why and meaning" of these changes — and later shared these elements with the artists.

During 2015-6 the exhibition opened in four galleries in Mexico, each time for at least six weeks: William Spratling Museum in Taxco, Guerrero; Fuerte de San Diego Museum in Acapulco, Guerrero; Casona Spencer in Cuernavaca, Morelos; and Casa de Morelos in Cuautla, Morelos. Atzin was responsible for logistics related to transportation, food and accommodation arrangements as well as for translation, proposal writing, funding obtainment, exhibit planning and organization of participant weavers.

We are your Future in Canada (2016-2017)

Phase II of the project includes the exhibition showing at the Menonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg (9 September to 12 November 2016); The Pearl Gallery in Hamilton, ON 19 November to 29 January 2017; and then in Belleville, ON 4 February to 16 March 2017); and possibly also in Ottawa and/or Montreal during the spring of 2017.

In each location during the inauguration time period, the women weavers will explain traditional concepts along with the Nahua leader who will accompany them, and give weaving demonstrations. They will have cultural exchanges with Canadians, opening the possibility of alliances and interchanges in future. Local Atzin volunteers will be assisting with translation, hospitality and meals as well as local transport.

special presentation (free admission)

"The long haul: the building of creativity and resilience in a troubled Mexican village"

Saturday, September 10, 3-5PM, Morden Menonite Church, 363 Gilmour St., Morden

Monday, September 12, 7:00PM, MHC Gallery

During this presentation **Dr. Susan Smith**, Founder and Director of Atzin in Mexico, will share stories, insights and photos from years of work in international development.

Palm weavers of Tlamacazapa will demonstrate their art in palm. Try your hand at weaving a small basket with their guidance. There will be a display of baskets and village products for sale.

As a Nahua cultural leader and teacher, **Ignacio Torres Ramirez** will open the presentation with a "salute to the sun" ceremony. He will explain its meaning and invite everyone to participate.

Weavers of Tlamacazapa, Guerrero, Mexico

The Nahua villagers earn a precarious living by weaving palm baskets and selling them on the streets throughout Mexico. Faced with poverty and a toxic environment of slow poisoning, women are gradually transforming their fear into greater self-confidence and skills. These experiences are strengthening their resilience, allowing more creative responses to the demands of their lives.

Susan Smith

Having lived and worked in numerous settings internationally, often under difficult circumstances or with few resources, Susan has gained a wide range of skills honed over more than thirty years of work in global development. Her responsibilities have ranged from directorship of disaster relief and emergency services; the design and implementation of complex processes of community programming in conditions of isolation or destitution; to the evaluation of large scale projects.

Proposals?

Artists, please, submit your proposals to us! The gallery hosts exhibits in approximate two month blocks throughout the year.

Mailing list

To receive **CANVASSs**, invitations to all exhibitions and other gallery updates contact Connie Wiebe, cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca.

Contact

Ray Dirks, MHC Gallery, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB Canada R3P 0M4. Ph: (204) 888-6781. E-mail: rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

Thanks

To all who make donations, large and small, we thank you for helping keep the gallery alive and relevant.

Please, consider a donation

I'd like to support the MHC Gallery (PLEASE PRINT)

name _____

address _____

_____ postal code _____

phone number (____) _____ amount _____

Make your cheque payable to the MHC Gallery

Mail to: MHC Gallery, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

Contact Connie Wiebe at (204) 888 6781 or cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca to donate

by credit card. Online at <https://gallery.mennonitechurch.ca/donate>

DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

The Artists

Alejandro Aranda, a Mexican artist, etches a mix of forceful messages, traditions and fanciful myth into unique prints, renowned for their fine detail and captivating imagery. Constantly evolving in technique and content, Aranda is revitalizing this art form as a rich expression of tradition and present day reality, often depicting the hidden, deeper Mexico as well as the simple beauty of a hand knotted shawl draped over a shoulder or a small child running with a paper kite. Firmly believing that art must be rooted in cultural and social purpose, Aranda's work has been in solidarity with the most important social movements in the country since 1975. Much of his art, now spread throughout Mexico, is indeed a rich expression of our common search for dignified lives characterized by peace, security and justice. Having spent his childhood in the Tierra Caliente region of Guerrero, Aranda now lives in Morelos.

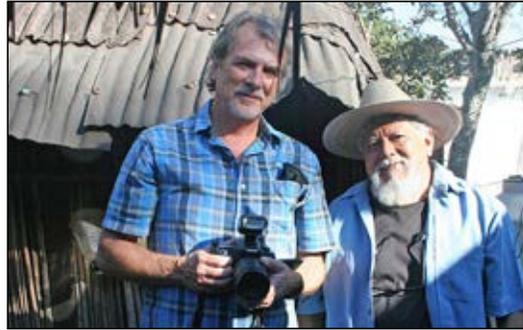
Ray Dirks is a Canadian artist whose paintings tell stories about our global family. As a painter, photographer, gallery curator and world traveller, his watercolours portray extraordinary images of ordinary people going about their daily lives. A master of his art, Dirks captures their dignity, youthfulness and humble courage while showing us the small details of their life circumstances. His artwork reflects his personal commitment to the colourful creation of hope, cultural bridges and peace-making, and reminds us to do the same. Largely self-taught, Dirks has received numerous art awards and grants. Since 1998, he has been the Curator and Resident Artist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg. Dirks' solo, joint and curated exhibitions, featuring art from more than 30 countries, have toured internationally.

Rufina Fermin Procopio earns her living by weaving intricate palm baskets. Having learned this art as a child by watching her mother work, Rufina is now a master weaver. She is skilled in the techniques of weaving and can creatively translate activities from everyday life into palm figures of unique design. Her small figures of *Meztli* on display illustrate many of the responsibilities of women in Tlamacazapa today. *Meztli* collects palm and firewood, fetches water;

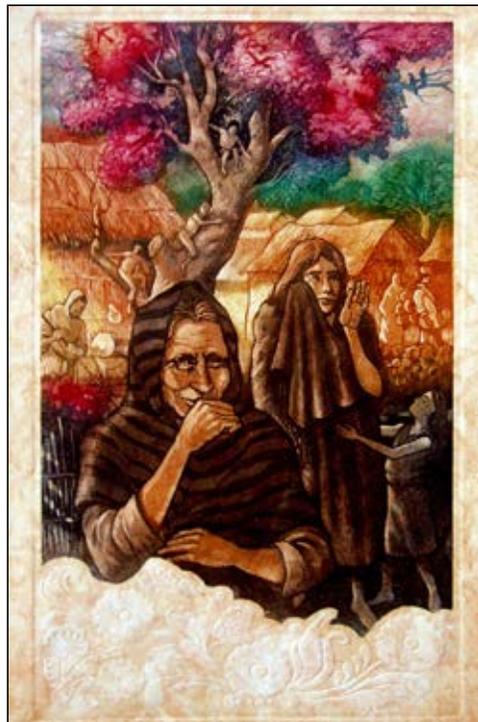
Canvas — a piece of strong cloth on which to paint a picture



Juntas/Together, watercolour by Ray Dirks



Ray Dirks and Alejandro Aranda in Tlamacazapa



Cotidianidad/Everyday, etching by Alejandro Aranda



Rufina Fermin Procopio

cares for her child; weaves a basket; prepares food; and teaches children. Rufina knows the daily struggle of poverty all too well, and steadfastly holds on to her dreams for the future, always gaining from challenging new experiences, "I want to learn, and to share that knowledge with my son and with others." Rufina lives in Tlamacazapa, Guerrero.

Examples of publicity and publications about the exhibition in Mexico

Caspar Díaz, J. (13 Dec. 2015). "Somos su futuro en la Casona." *Bajo el Volcán Suplemento Cultural, Diario la Unión de Morelos*, Cuernavaca, México. Five full page article in colour. PDF copy available on request.

Casona Spencer, Cuernavaca, México – Television Azteca

<https://www.facebook.com/aztecamorelosocial/videos/915017345220463/?pnref=story>

Fuerte de San Diego, Acapulco, Mexico

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=956648447710033&id=553211828053699

The Organizing Partner in Mexico

Atzin Desarrollo Comunitario, A.C. (Cuernavaca, México) is a humanitarian, non-profit organization based in Cuernavaca, Morelos, working closely with a sister organization, **Atzin Canada**, in Ottawa.

Since 1997, Atzin has responded to the needs of the Tlamacazapa community in Guerrero by gradually establishing programs in four integrated sectors: Health and healing; Income generation for women; Community education and literacy; and Environment, water and sanitation.

Contact: Dr. Susan Smith, Director, Atzin in Mexico. Telephone: (52) (777) 310-5577 or (587) 832 2383. Email: atzinmexico97@gmail.com and atzinmexico97@gmail.com and www.atzin.org

Special thank you to Ruth and David Wiens.



NEXT

Megan Krause and Dale Boldt, two solo exhibitions open Friday, November 18.

ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

Friday, September 30, 7:30PM. Connie Wiebe to RSVP, cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca or 204 888 6781, ext 194.

OPENING of *Along the Road to Freedom*

A special MHC Gallery event and exhibition at the Manitoba Legislative Building, Sunday, October 30, 2:30PM.

examine carefully, discuss — **Canvas**

MHC Gallery
a long road
Along the Road
Annual

FUNDRAISER

Friday
September 30
7:30PM

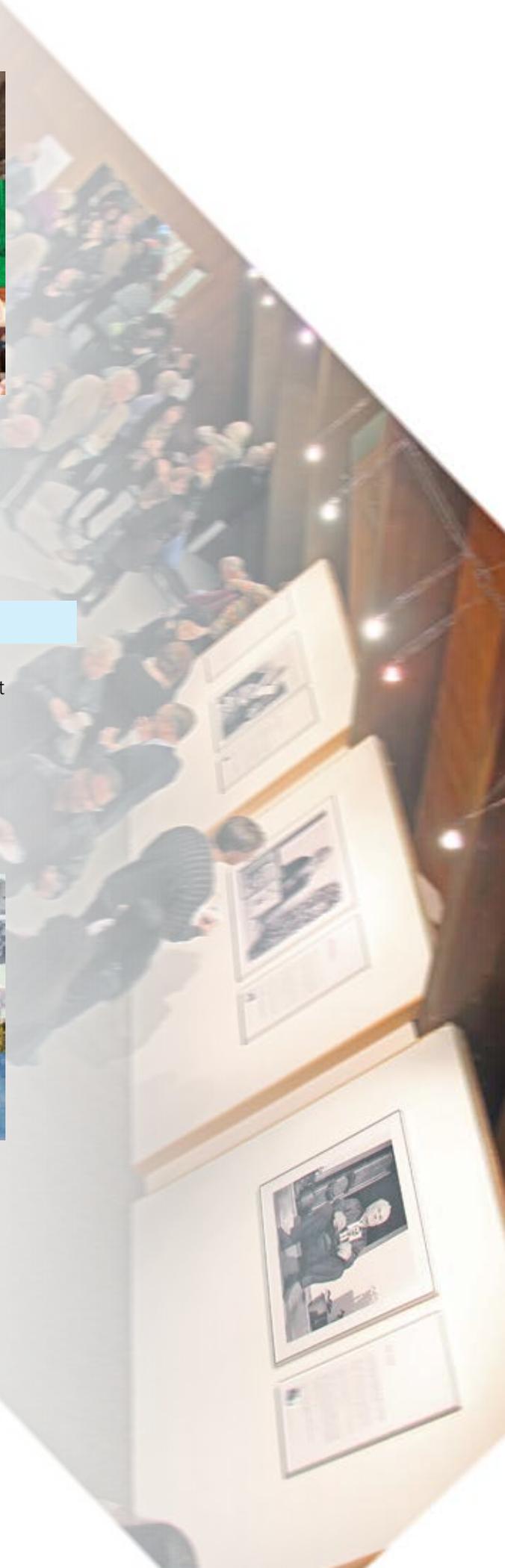


- 1998...
- 2010 Celebrate 12 years of art and more
- 2011 a fine (art) balance
- 2012 Journeys
- 2013 15 years and counting/15 years that counted
- 2014 What's your story?
- 2015 Together

2016 a long road

Many roads have led to where the gallery is today. Join us at the annual fundraiser and learn about some of the current roads, and where they point — *Along the Road to Freedom, We Are Your Future, Leap in Faith* and others. Our fundraisers are renowned for their fast pace, informative and entertaining program, fabulous desserts, surrounded by wonderful art and atmosphere.

RSVP by September 13 to Connie Wiebe at cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca or call 204 888 6781 ext 194.





Such meaningful work — capturing the spirit of courage and hope despite so much adversity. And the artwork takes my breath away.

Konigstein, Germany

Along the Road to Freedom

comes home

OPENING CELEBRATION

Manitoba Legislative Building ROTUNDA

Sunday, 2:30PM, October 30, 2016

Join artist Ray Dirks, project committee members Wanda Andres, Nettie Dueck, Hans Funk, Henry Bergen and exhibition sponsoring families to celebrate, to honour, to sing, to hear heart-stirring music, to experience powerful stories in art

Winnipeg exhibition venue and dates:

Keystone Gallery, Manitoba Legislative Building (free admission)
October 30, 2016-January 29, 2017

Along the Road to Freedom: Mennonite women of courage and faith has been on the tour road for two and a half years. The tour has weaved through Canada and the US. It has met with acclaim wherever it has gone. The opening at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre at the University of Saskatchewan earlier this year attracted one of the largest opening audiences in the history of the institution.

The exhibit includes 26 large watercolours by Ray Dirks honouring women who brought, or attempted to bring, their families, often without men, out of the former Soviet Union to peace and freedom in Canada.

The 26th painting, completed this March, is significantly larger than the others, approximately seven feet across. The original will be unveiled at the opening at the Manitoba Legislative Building.

Please, join us at Manitoba's most significant public building, the Manitoba Legislative Building, on October 30.

It is a story about the courage and ingenuity of women which transcends its specific Mennonite details. In it Mennonite woman has become "Everywoman" on the world stage.

Toronto, Ontario

I have been reminded of the power of visual storytelling.

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

I made it to the fourth or fifth painting and then was overcome with emotion. I wept. I sobbed. I, in just a small way and for just a short time, felt the emotion that these dear folks felt for many years.

Gap, Pennsylvania

This is a "must see" not only for Mennonites but also for anyone interested in life's essence.

Gordonville, Pennsylvania

What a fabulous collection. *Saint Catharines, Ontario*