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Ray Dirks, curator, rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

March 13 – June 20

Opening: Sunday, March 15, 2:30 pm

Lynda Toews: A PLACE IN THE KINGDOM Paintings and Heritage Stories Celebrating Farm Animals

Judy Paschalis: TILLIE'S STORY

A series of quilts about the life of a Kansas Mennonite woman

Annie Janzen: MY LIFE'S STORY IN JARS ON 9 SHELVES

LYNDA TOEWS: This project includes 50 paintings and 22 stories from Manitobans who grew up on farms. Farm animals are typically represented in craft or folk art. I propose that they are a worthy genre for fine art (as quilts have come to be accepted in recent decades), and a worthy topic in the Mennonite story.

Since moving to rural Manitoba nearly five years ago, I have found myself drawn to the personalities and beauty of local farm animals and was inspired to paint them. Spectators of the paintings will encounter the straightforward gaze of fellow creatures who share the earth.

They are bathed in warm light and painted with a strong commitment to artistic technical facility.

Being alive is an amazing thing! A mechanic can disassemble a motorcycle, put it back together, and it will run again. A surgeon cannot do that with a living creature. Painting these animals, declaring them beautiful and worthy of our attention, is one way of honouring and celebrating their God-given life and moving us into a more soulful connection with nature and with its creator.

Working with this subject matter led me to explore how farm animals contributed to the Mennonite journey of survival (I am sure many other cultural journeys are similar). They provide(d) labour, transportation, meat, eggs, milk, cheese, butter, wool, lanolin, glue, heat (use of manure bricks for fuel), alarm clocks (roosters), mouse traps (cats), fertilizer, insulation, security (guard animals), artist brushes, leather, violin bow hair, gut strings, medications, porcine heart valves, companionship and fun. We provide farm animals with food, care and protection.

Painting farm animals also inspired me to collect stories about them. Mennonites have mined so many aspects of their own history – studies of furniture, toys, farming, church institutions, music, and so on – but their animals seem to remain relatively invisible. Yet, a



Border Action, Lynda Toews

family's horse, for example, may have been more important to their survival than their children in the sense that without their horse they could not have fed their children.

I hope these shared stories will forge stronger connections between the generations, as well as urban and rural people. (Many city children think that eggs and milk come from the store, and they seem insulated from the reality that they are connected to farm animals.) With our 21st century urban lifestyle we can easily forget the beauty in natural things – soft fur, warm breath and the smell of hay.

I also hope these stories and paintings will evoke contemplation of the beauty,

intelligence, individuality, and loyalty of farm animals as well as the love that can exist in the human/animal relationship. May these animals find a special place in our hearts and kingdoms: the animal kingdom, the "Mennonite kingdom," the "art kingdom," and, in a sense, the kingdom of God. After all, they were even present at the Nativity.

100 free story booklets will be available at the opening and there will be public sharing of some of these stories. The story booklet is also available in pdf format at: <http://gallery.mennonitechurch.ca/LyndaToews>.

Lynda Toews has degrees in Fine Arts and Education from the University of Manitoba. Her involvement in arts education includes teaching, writing the Manitoba provincial position paper for arts education curriculum renewal and writing the education section of an art website for the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Toews has published in *Sophia*, *Other Voices*, *The Plug In Herald*, *Rhubarb*, *Canadian Mennonite*, *The Carillon*, and *The Dawson Trail Dispatch*. She has exhibited in many juried and group shows, and her farm animal paintings/stories solo exhibits in recent years include The Silent Contribution (Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach) and Barn Dance (Steinbach Arts Council). Toews was also the featured visual artist with her Nativity painting at the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra Holiday Pops concert in 2014.

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Skating Lakeside School, Judy Paschalis

JUDY PASCHALIS:

In 2001, I began to feel the need to express my memories and other thoughts by creating fiber art. My mother's stories of her life brought many visual vignettes to my mind that I thought I would be able to develop into fiber art. The individual pieces that make up "Tillie's Story" were begun in 2002. The written story and most of the quilts were completed shortly after I retired in 2010.

All the fiber art that I create is largely made from fabric

and thread, but I also use embellishments of beads and/or ribbons and, many times, I print my photographs on fabric and use the photograph as the basis for the quilt.

I call my pieces QuiltToons; these range from political commentary to memories of time spent with grandchildren. Because I am self-taught I consider myself a folk artist. I did learn to sew in 4-H many moons ago in rural Central Kansas; but I have no training in art except for one 6-week cartooning class. I have taken several classes on quilt making and fiber art throughout the years, and I belong to a group of fiber artists who meet monthly and provide much inspiration and knowledge of techniques.

I write a blog called the QuiltToonist; it is a log of the fiber art pieces I make and is a way of having my creative work "shown." I believe this art and the blog are adding to the purpose and meaning of my life. My professional career was, in general, communications. At various times, I was a local television reporter, a talk show host, a public relations specialist, and, in my last employment, the coordinator of a program that supported grandparents and other relatives who were rearing relatives' children. I have a Master's Degree in Communications from Bowling Green State University in Ohio. I live in Toledo, Ohio with my husband of 34 years. We have four children, eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, one cat, four chickens and two fish. My work can be seen at www.quilttoonist.wordpress.com

ANNIE JANZEN has always enjoyed jars. So when she wondered what to put in hers, someone suggested items from her life. Then a friend helped her to build a shelf to put them on, one she varnished herself. Annie's jars are filled with items from her travels, grains and legumes that nourish her, and other items that friends and family have filled. Annie asked them to participate by putting something in a jar that explains what Annie's life means to them.

Her niece painted scenes from nature and put the painting in a jar because she is inspired by Annie's love of nature.

Then there are the jars filled with items from her two trips around the world. One trip went from east to west, the other, ten years later, went from west to east. Annie took these trips during the summer, when she wasn't working as head cook for Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University). She worked in that position for 27 years.

A very special item is a photo of an astronomical clock, which Annie got in Prague. After she returned home she had a dream about her life and all the people she knew, that ended with a door behind which she could see a bright light. The dream ended before Annie went through the door, but she now knows what her eternity will look like. The dream is symbolized by a light at the top of her shelf.



Annie now lives at Bethel Place where she enjoys gardening at Riverview Garden Society, preserving food and cooking it. CMBC Alumni are moving into Bethel Place. Now when she invites them to her apartment for a meal, she is cooking for the Alumni.

NEXT: June 29 to September 5: Manitoba Society of Artists annual juried show.

Proposals?

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

Mailing list

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

Contact

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

Thanks

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Canvass

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