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 Ray Dirks, curator, rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

STORIES IN ART FROM IRAQI KURDISTAN

April 2 - May 14, 2016

Opening Saturday, April 2, 7:30 pm

In the last three years Iraqi Kurdistan (northern Iraq) with a usual population of 5 million has become host to 2.5 million refugees and displaced persons. This small geographical area is now home to several faith and cultural groups including Syrian and Syrian Kurdish refugees and Iraqi, Yazidi and Christian internally displaced persons (IDP).

Christian Peacemaker Teams Iraqi Kurdistan has had a presence in the region since 2006. CPT is an organization that had its roots in the peace churches of North America. Their mission is to "build partnerships to transform violence and oppression." In six regions of the world CPT stands with, accompanies and raises the voices of marginalized individuals and communities.

Kathy Moorhead Thiessen, a resident of Winnipeg who attends Hope Mennonite Church, has been a member of the team in northern Iraq since 2011. After Ray Dirks wrote to suggest an exhibition of art from ordinary people (not necessarily trained artists) from Iraqi Kurdistan she began the search for people willing to share their story. The concept was a little difficult to convey as in that region exhibitions are not planned 10 months in advance. However, soon she found that works of art from Iraqi Kurds, Syrian Kurds, Yazidis, Assyrian Christians and Iraqi Arabs began to arrive at the CPT house.

Through our work the CPT team has had contact with representatives of most of these groups. Kathy found people from the host Iraqi Kurdish community who depict life at the best times; in the farming villages and times of celebration. She discovered a group of Syrian Kurdish children and their art teacher who shared images of life before the conflict started. She found four Yazidi artists who portrayed the horror and grief of the last year and a half since they had to run from their homes onto the mountain of Sinjar.

Members of the Assyrian Catholic community shared pictures of the days when ISIS invaded the Christian city of Qaraqush and



Yazidi artist



Baghdad artist



Assyrian Christian artist

they had to flee for their lives. Kathy received pictures from ten young boys (age 10-13) who now have to work daily in the Sulaimani bazaar selling small items in order to support their families. They depicted what their life was like in Salahadeen in central Iraq before their families had to flee to the north to live in the tent camps. A young woman from Baghdad who had tried to find a better life in the Kurdish north created a painting on fabric of her city before the wars began.

Some of the artworks are quite primitive but with the artists' statements have a huge impact. We see pictures of places where there were few photographs taken and we are able to view the events right from the people who were there.

NEXT: Photographs from nature by Robb Nickel and Wally Jansen; Wood works by Stan Born. May 20 to July 2 Opening May 20, 7:30 pm

Along the Road to Freedom is complete!

The final painting of this exhibition has been completed. The works are now on exhibit at the Diefenbaker Centre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, for the first time with all 26 paintings. The exhibition will be shown in Steinbach this summer, and then at the Manitoba Legislative Building in Winnipeg from October to January. **Plan to attend the opening on Sunday, October 23.**



Margaret Dyck Thiessen Ray Dirks

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**s, 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

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

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