

MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE Gallery

# CANVASSs

Volume XIII, No. 2, March April 2010

<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/gallery/>

hours: Mon. – Fri., 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM; Sat., noon – 5 PM

an institution of Mennonite Church Canada

located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University

**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](mailto:cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca).

(204) 888 6781; Ray Dirks, curator, [rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca)

## Gallery statement

*In the Spirit of Humanity* celebrates and reflects the increasingly multicultural face of Canada, of our city, Winnipeg. Manju Lodha, Isam Aboud and Ray Dirks have spent the past several months traveling from school to school, offering multimedia presentations and art workshops to students from grades one to 12 and to newcomers in adult English as an Additional Language programs, from the inner city to the suburbs. There have been smiles, laughs and tears. There has been spontaneous singing and dancing.

At the beginning of one workshop a Liberian refugee said she had never painted, couldn't do it. At the end of the workshop she leapt to her feet to proudly point out the significance of every detail in her painting.


The idea is simple. We all have something to teach. We all have something to learn. We should celebrate and not fear our increasingly diverse society. Stereotypes need to be challenged. We need to get to know each other. We need to accept each other. Immigrants and refugees, whether recently arrived or here for generations, the original inhabitants of this land, all have something positive to offer. In getting to know one another we discover differences that are neither right nor wrong, they are just different. In getting to know each other we discover similarities. We can all be thankful to be in this country, to be Canadians.

The presentations offer glimpses into the lives and motivations of Lodha, Aboud and Dirks. They affirm the fact that the world is now in Canada. The presenters then turn to the participating students and say, "Now, we want to get to know you." They are invited to create art.

This exhibition is the result. Come, get to know the participating students, get to know our city.

## The artist presenters

This morning Isam Aboud and his family were at Polo Park. In a phone call, he exclaimed, "Kids recognized me and came running to ask when we would be back at their school. I introduced them to my wife and son. It was wonderful."

Aboud and his wife, Heba, are refugees from Sudan. They are Muslims. To be a refugee, an African and a Muslim and to respond after a coincidental encounter in a Winni- 

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

# In the Spirit of Humanity STUDENT EXHIBITION

**OPENING: Friday, March 12, 7:30PM**

March 12-April 24

## Guests of honour

Hon. Nancy Allan, Minister of Education

Hon. Flor Marcelino, Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism

## In the Spirit of Humanity participating schools

Cecil Rhodes School

David Livingstone School

École Crane

École Lansdowne

École Van Wallegghem

École Viscount Alexander

General Wolfe School

Gordon Bell High School

Hugh John Macdonald School

John Henderson Junior High School

Kildonan East Collegiate

Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute

Munroe Junior High School

Off Campus Program, Kelvin, Churchill and Grant Park High Schools

Stevenson-Britannia Adult Learning Centre

St. Norbert Immersion School

WAEC (Winnipeg Adult Education Centre), Elmwood High School

## Special thanks to

Manitoba Association for Multicultural Education (MAME)

Winnipeg Foundation

## Artist Presenters

Isam Aboud

Manju Lodha

Ray Dirks



## Special opening performances

John Henderson Junior High dancers (saris and inspiration from Manju Lodha; special thanks to Tamara Young)

Somali singers, WAEC, Elmwood High School

*In the Spirit of Humanity is a project of the MHC Gallery, funded by the Winnipeg Foundation and supported by the Manitoba Association for Multicultural Education (MAME)*



## 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](mailto: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](mailto:rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca)

## Thanks

Bill and Margaret Fast, Herb and Erna Buller, Ted and Mary Paetkau, Frank and Agnes DeFehr, The Winnipeg Foundation, Friesens, Art and Leona DeFehr, Herb Peters and Donna Peters-Small, and all those who support in whatever fashion

examine carefully, discuss — **Canvass**



peg mall, "It was wonderful" reveals the good getting to know each other can accomplish.

Aboud supported himself as an artist in both Sudan and Kenya before coming to Canada six years ago. He is now a proud Canadian with a Canadian born son and another baby soon to arrive.

Manju Lodha has lived in Canada longer than her native India, arriving as an immigrant with her husband, Ganpat, more than 35 years ago. She loves the culture of her Rajasthan homeland. She is anchored by her Hindu faith. She is proudly Indian. She is equally proudly Canadian. She has long been a promoter of multi-cultural education in Manitoba.

Ray Dirks has worked in 30 countries as an artist, photographer and curator. He began working in Winnipeg schools in the 1990s after being approached by an EAL teacher who had seen an African student transformed by the positive approach of a presentation on an exhibition of African art Dirks brought together. Dirks' Mennonite grandparents came to Canada as refugees.

## Personal Reflection

### Manju Lodha

The *In The Spirit of Humanity* project has been an amazingly satisfying experience. It nourished my soul and gave me an opportunity to touch and be touched by many budding individuals and adults. Some of them are new to our country and are learning English as an additional language, yet there was so much to learn from them. We also approached the community in more ways than just through schools – connecting with parents, religious institutions and organizations like the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba. Everywhere people were very kind to give us time for our presentations. We were humbled.

It took me back in time to when I was a newcomer. I was lonely, struggled to find work and to fit in. At times, I still do but my story is nothing like those of some of our newcomers. Many of them are from war torn countries and lost their husbands, relatives and friends. I admired their strength. I could experience love in their hearts and torture in their tears.

When they saw me in my sari, they could not believe that I have been in Canada for 37 years. I assured them that in our Canada we can be who we are while, at the same time, we can contribute to the Canadian Mosaic and be law abiding citizens.

They all enjoyed our art and multimedia presentations. But when it came to have them paint about their heritage or to depict according to them what is good for humanity, their immediate answer often was, "I have never done this sort of thing before. I don't know how." Well, within a few minutes the same person could produce a beautiful piece of art revealing something about their homeland and sometimes also about their new home; Canada.

They shared their experiences through their art and when we asked them to describe it, their enthusiasm to share their work brought words to their mouths. It was a MAGIC! Then we informed them of the upcoming show at the MHC Gallery. It added to their zeal and they tried their best to write descriptions for their artworks!

For me, the meaning of "Education" became richer! I think, it is to connect with people, celebrate our diversity, to acknowledge our similarities and to learn from each other.

The subject of our project, *In the Spirit of Humanity*, made the participants think critically and come up with their own ideas about what "in the spirit of humanity" means, revealing those thoughts through art and words. *Manju Lodha*

## Two Special Evenings with Australian artist Roger Byrt

Australian artist Roger Byrt, former Head of Painting, Faculty of Art and Design, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, is temporarily residing in Winnipeg. The MHC Gallery is happy to host two evenings with Byrt in March and April.

**Friday, March 26, 7:30PM**

### Australian Aboriginal Art

Byrt will deliver a power point presentation on Australian Aboriginal Art from the sacred rock art of the north to the painting of the central deserts along with the work of some major urban Aboriginal artists. Discover beautiful art and the magnificent landscapes of each of the regions that inspired it. Encounter the diversity of styles of the painters of the desert around Uluru and Alice Springs and the iconography and symbols in their paintings.

**Friday, April 9, 7:30PM**

### Caravaggio in 3D

Caravaggio in 3D is a spatial exploration and celebration of Caravaggio's distortions, his composition and the 'theatre' of his painting. Byrt will illustrate exactly how Caravaggio's paintings are activated and show the strong influence on his own studio practice, followed by a selection of Byrt's paintings. *(For those not on the electronic mailing list, visit the gallery's webpage for more information on Caravaggio in 3D. <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/gallery/>)*



**(left) Buzz by Roger Byrt**

### Up next

Group show featuring Altona area artists opens on April 30.

### Donations

Please, continue to give so that the gallery can do its good work in the gallery and in the community. *In the Spirit of Humanity* is a prime example of the larger role the gallery plays outside its walls. All donations are tax deductible and can be made by cash, cheque — made out to the MHC Gallery — or credit card. Contact Connie Wiebe at [cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca) or 888 6781 for more information.

**CANVASs**

## Please, consider a donation

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

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contact Connie Wiebe at (204) 888 6781 or [cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca) to donate by credit card

**DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE**

artworks by elementary age students from David Livingstone School and by adult EAL students at Elmwood High School



## THE WORK OF ROGER BYRT

### AUSTRALIAN DRAWING by Janet McKenzie

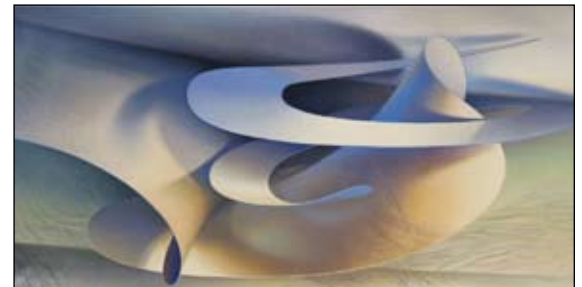
The project CARAVAGGIO IN 3D (2003) indicates Roger Byrt's interest in the mechanics of composition and the importance of mathematical precision. Using 21st century technology to explore the working methods of the 16th century artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, and with the assistance of architect Robert McGauran, Byrt set about to analyze the use of space and symmetry in Caravaggio's painting. THE CONVERSION OF ST PAUL (1600) Caravaggio is attributed to having achieved a heightened naturalism and while Byrt finds the romance and drama of Caravaggio's infamous life alluring it is the composition of the works that he is particularly drawn to. He dissects the work to indicate that the figures were in fact heavily manipulated. "Everyone loves the theatre and myths surrounding Caravaggio but for me it is composition that I really get excited about- the way that my eye is led in and out and throughout like a great adventure.

The exhibition featured a 3D reconstruction of CONVERSION OF ST PAUL and the construction of a hypothetical interpretation - a naturalistic version of the work. The fact that Caravaggio is known for his innovative use of light, and his breaking from convention of the time with the use of real models, makes the investigation into his actual distortion of the facts before him, in perceptual observation all the more interesting. Byrt found Caravaggio to have distorted the anatomy of the figures and the horse for aesthetic ends. The distortions enabled Caravaggio to activate the composition by a strong circular movement and emphasize the interplay between different parts of the painting. CARAVAGGIO IN 3D also includes models, line drawings and silhouettes of Caravaggio's work and the naturalistic reconstruction, each side by side. The deconstruction of the work revealed a catalogue of distortions in terms of naturalistic truth: a leg is missing from the knee down, the horse is far too tall and one of its legs is proportionally too short; there is an unnatural bend in the horse's hock. The second figure's torso is too short for its height and the arms are abnormally long. Byrt's naturalistic version was constructed firstly as a linear drawing which could be viewed alongside a linear version of the original. Byrt imposes arrows to indicate the energy and direction created by Caravaggio's distorted positioning of the figures in relation to the horse. The figures in the hypothetical version are anatomically plausible but an aesthetic disappointment in terms of the overall composition. The arrows take the eye into an inert void in the centre of the composition. Further digital imaging by Byrt reveals the full extent of Caravaggio's distortions. The naturalistic version is less beautiful and very much less evocative. Byrt reveals the extent of Caravaggio's sacrifice of the physical truth for emotional intensity and drama, in fact how "the distortions effectively function as compositional devices to activate the theatre of the painting. For example, the short foreleg acts as the hub of a big circular sweep of a wheel described by the horse and St Paul's arms"<sup>2</sup>

Describing his family background as mathematical, Byrt's studio practice has always been analytical. During his early years as a painter Roger Byrt was inspired by the compositional aspects of Seurat, Piero della Francesca, Tiepolo and to a lesser extent Giorgio De Chirico. "In my early drawings I began the process by drawing distorted perspectival grids then attaching aerial views of city buildings to the grids. The finished drawings distorted wildly but the grids held them together. Incrementally, I became more interested in the grid structures and other processes of picture making. I used drawings to prepare for painting - to sort out spatial problems like rubrics cubes; when at the point where nearly everything locks together I begin to paint. My drawings are my visual thinking. I keep nearly all of them."<sup>3</sup> The drawing MOBIUS STRIP (2006) employs the grid to create a surface of intense energy and movement. The mobius strip is a surface with only one side and only one boundary component and has the mathematical property of being non-orientable. It is a ruled surface and was discovered independently by the German mathematicians August Ferdinand Möbius and Johann Benedict Listing in 1888. As an artist with a mathematical bent, Roger Byrt finds the properties of the mobius strip intriguing. It has provided inspiration for artists such as M.C. Escher who based several lithographs on it. A famous Escher work MOBIUS STRIP 2 (1963) features an ant crawling on the surface of the mobius strip. In science fiction it lends itself to bizarre developments, such as Arthur C. Clarke's, The Wall of Darkness (1949). Their endless linear character enables Byrt to play with the forms in two-dimensions, emphasizing density and creating an intense mood from a satisfying linear pattern. A model of mobius strip can be created by joining the ends of a strip of paper with a single half twist. In this the mobius strip can be seen to create a form of spatial drawing. A line drawn starting from the seam down the middle will meet back at the seam but it will be on the other side. The transference of the mathematical patterning results in works that are both elegant and enigmatic.

Nevill Drury observes that in Byrt's art works, "what one sees may not be the whole picture", that in his interiors and still life works, "artifacts and objects are placed in strange juxtaposition, evoking a distinct sense of visual irony and ambiguity -while the creator - the weaver of these fantasies - remains unacknowledged and very much behind the scenes".<sup>4</sup> Byrt's precise analytical approach underpins his stated aim, "to evoke a sense of another time, another place - a real sense of 'the other'. The absence of the figures in his works does not denote a disinterest in human impact - indeed he is attracted to the places that resonate with drama and historical significance. His interest in Carravaggio's working methods and to Renaissance painting and the Italian Scuola de Metafisica reveals a curious enthusiasm for timeless human issues. His work based in drawing seeks to analyze and "to depict eternal things such as light, space and form"<sup>5</sup>

## PAINTINGS BY ROGER BYRT



1. Roger Byrt, email to Janet McKenzie, 13 July 2009.

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. Nevill Drury, "Roger Byrt", in Australian Painting Now, edited by Laura Murray Cree and Nevill Drury, Thames and Hudson, London, 2000, p.80

5. Byrt quoted ibid, p.80