

MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE Gallery

CANVASS

Volume XIII, No. 4, June September 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.

(204) 888 6781; Ray Dirks, curator, rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

In the Spirit of Humanity *voices of the artists and gallery*

Ray Dirks

In the Spirit of Humanity is a multilayered MHC Gallery project. The first layer was revealed in January 2009 as Manju Lodha and I exhibited together in Jaipur, India. Dr. M.K. Sharma helped make our exhibition possible at the Jawahar Kala Kendra Art Centre. Following, Manju, Isam About and I led art workshops in schools and adult EAL (English as an Additional Language) programs throughout Winnipeg. More than 1,000 students participated and nearly 500 contributed art to the *In the Spirit of Humanity Student Exhibition* which took place earlier this year. Now it is the presenters turn to be featured.

In the Spirit of Humanity is about sharing, respecting, getting to know one another. It is about acceptance. Using our experiences as artists from different cultural and religious backgrounds as guides and inspiration, we encouraged students, from early primary grades to adult EAL, to freely express themselves as valued, accepted, equal members of our community. As Isam mentions, we couldn't help but learn from each other. In learning to know each other comes acceptance. Acceptance removes fears. We are different — we don't and don't have to agree on everything — but we do need to live together, we do share many values and we should celebrate the decency in each of our cultures and faiths.

Working with Manju and Isam has been a pleasure. We come from Hindu, Muslim and Christian backgrounds. We respect and accept our differences. In getting to know each other, we have realized we also have many similarities. We all have the same goal — to make a difference for good in our community while being true to ourselves.

We hope we have been positive role models.

This presenters' exhibition gives each of us the opportunity to express ourselves as we wish "in the spirit of humanity". Whether in India, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cuba or Canada — the countries represented in my art created for this show — I am always looking for decency and dignity in the ordinary, in the common person, in those who may be marginalized, forgotten.

All but my Gandhi paintings were created in the last month. Each of the most recent paintings is inspired by a thought that often crosses my mind, especially as I travel. I see someone looking out the window of a passing bus. In a flash he is gone. I see a woman selling bread or charcoal at the roadside. She is busy working to support her family. In a flash she is gone. Our paths will never cross again. My life is all consuming. Her life is all consuming. His life is all consuming. We are at the centre of each of our worlds. We take up a

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

In the Spirit of Humanity

MANJULODHARAYDIRKSISAMABOUT
& Dr. M. K. Sharma, Jaipur, India

OPENING: Thursday, June 24, 7:30PM

Guest of Honour:

Flor Marcelino, Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism

June 24-September 18, 2010



tiny space and fill it, for good or bad, between good and bad. But to the rest of the world we are irrelevant, at most a passing blur. But, if we look closely for that split second we will see pain, joy, passion, integrity, suspicion, curiosity, indifference, love, despair.... We share this world. We each take up our space differently. For the most part, we know nothing about each other.

I wonder if anyone else shares thoughts of curiosity about those we pass.

I do believe we were all created to be equal. As it states in the book of Genesis, we are all created in God's image. What that literally means, I don't know. But my heart, my head and my gut tell me it suggests I pursue justice and reveal dignity with passion and commitment.

Each person in my recent paintings — except my mother, Mama Kadi and the Master Drummer — I met only in passing, for a second or, at most, part of an afternoon. But my not knowing them, not knowing their space in the world, does not make them of any less value. As we told every child and adult who participated in *In the Spirit of Humanity*, each has value, each can have something to offer. Each can make the world a better place, even if just in his or her small space. *Ray Dirks*

Manju Lodha

Courageously or foolishly, I wander in the wonder world of Western art with satisfaction and disappointments. My efforts to bring change satisfy me. Treading waters in the systemic world of peer assessments where I

have no peers often disappoints me. Yet, I'm confident many younger artists understand me, as they have been in contact with people of visible minorities. They have often had more multicultural experiences than older generations. I have a flicker of hope that one day my art will have space in their minds and hearts and the gallery walls they will curate.

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

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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 — **Canvas**

The most comfortable way for me to connect to the world is through my art. It is a relationship of dedication and deep dilemma, where the dedication takes over. It is an effort to reach out and influence change. Despite disappointments, my soul keeps moving my brushes towards various issues, humbly giving them a form in colour. Not worrying about the outcome, I have not tried to fit into Western categories of art. Whatever they may call me, I am who I am; "A Free Spirit"!

In the show, *In the Spirit of Humanity*, my art pieces were created, as and when my spirit wanted to create. I took as much time as I wanted and painted various issues that touch humanity according to me.

I also learned a lot from students and newcomers we had worked with in *In the Spirit of Humanity* workshops. I learned from everyone I met in the process. I learned from speeches I heard, books I read, reactions to comments I made and also from misunderstandings and disagreements. Everything has added to my growth as an artist and I'm thankful for that.

My sincere thanks to Ray Dirks, the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery and to the Mennonite Church for having my art as a part of this show! *Manju Lodha*

Isam About

Art is part of me. Art is an integral part of my life.

I began attending the College of Fine Art at the Sudan University of Science and Technology in 1990. I graduated in 1994. I had the opportunity to study under several renowned Sudanese artists. My technique was greatly improved. Since art school, I have participated in many workshops, in Sudan and elsewhere in East Africa. I moved to Kenya and lived with a group of Sudanese artists in Nairobi. We worked together, shared life and experiences. My artistic technique improved and expanded.

Six years ago my wife, Heba, and I were able to come to Winnipeg as refugees. I had participated in a workshop with Ray Dirks in Kenya several years before. We reconnected in Winnipeg. In 2006 Ray and I, along with Karen Cornelius and Ruth Maendel, traveled to Trinidad to take part in an exhibition there. Ray and I continued working together on *In the Spirit of Humanity*.

In the Spirit of Humanity brought us in contact with many students. I was able to teach them but I also learned from them, even down to the youngest age. I loved to encourage them and loved how they created without intimidation. For example, they were not scared of colour, any colour. Their freedom and enthusiasm has helped me to grow as an artist.

My creative process is sometimes planned. Often it isn't planned. I approach paper or canvas without knowing where I am headed. I start a pattern and thoughts and ideas follow. That freedom works well with the freedom I've experienced in the creative process of young students.

As a result of my experiences with children, I would like to continue working with young students. I enjoyed the simple story of acceptance and respect we presented to students through Manju Lodha's story featuring peacocks and loons helping each other – birds native to two of her homes, Jaipur, Rajasthan and Pinawa, Manitoba. The students were asked to set their creativity free while creating paintings completing the story. I would like to keep unlocking, discovering, sharing and creating stories.

We learn from each other while working together. When we created art together in *In the Spirit of Humanity* work-

CANVASs

shops, even if we presenters and the students didn't know it at the time, we were learning from each other simply by sharing stories and the creative process. *Isam About*

Dr. M.K. Sharma

Dr. Sharma has been an advisor, teacher and mentor to Manju Lodha. He made Manju's and Ray's Jaipur exhibition possible. As a result of his connections to our work, he was invited to contribute paintings to the *In the Spirit of Humanity* exhibition.

Special Thanks

- The Winnipeg Foundation for generous support towards *In the Spirit of Humanity*
- Timothy Dyck for covering for Ray Dirks as he prepared for the exhibition
- Ganpat Lodha for carrying Dr. Sharma's artworks from Jaipur to Winnipeg
- all those who helped make this exhibition possible

ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

Thursday, September 30, 7:30PM

The MHC Gallery relies almost entirely on your donations to meet its operating budget. Money for salaries, mounting and hanging expenses, copying, mailing, etc... has to be raised entirely through donations. We have come to rely on the annual fundraiser to account for approximately half of the donations needed annually. Please, consider attending. If you cannot attend, please, consider a generous donation.

You can already confirm a place at the fundraiser by contacting Connie Wiebe at cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca or by calling 888 6781.

More information and formal invitations will be coming soon.

NEEDED NOW

Donations are down **significantly** thus far this year compared to the past several years. Summer is typically a dry donation period. Can you help us now? Send cheques made out to the MHC Gallery to: MHC Gallery, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4. Or, call Connie Wiebe at 888 6781 to donate by credit card.

NEXT

7:30PM, September 24. An extraordinary journey around the world with Rey Pagé.

Please, consider a donation

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

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