#### Invitation to host the touring exhibition

### Along the Road to Freedom Mennonite women of courage & faith

a project of the MHC (Mennonite Heritage Centre) Gallery Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

26 paintings, 49" x 30" (125cm x 76cm) each 7 didactic panels, 19 ½" x 31" (50cm x 79cm) each

available for touring in North America, mid-2015 onwards print version available for touring in Europe, mid-2015 onwards

this PDF includes information on the exhibition, images of most (not all) of the artworks

contact Ray Dirks, curator/artist MHC Gallery 600 Shaftesbury Blvd. Winnipeg, MB Canada R3P 0M4 204 888 6781, extension 196 rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

the MHC Gallery is located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University and is a self-funded program of Mennonite Church Canada

Along the Road to Freedom sponsors include over 100 individuals and families, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, Mennonite Benevolent Society





Many Mennonites living in Russia left, fled, attempted to flee, led by Women, even girls, often without men, the chaos in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the horrors of Stalin's persecution that followed. Many were part of the Great Trek in 1943 which, in the midst of war, wove its way from Mennonite colonies in south Russia (Ukraine) towards the west and hoped for eventual freedom and peace.

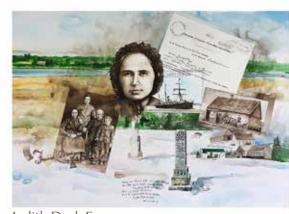
Along the Road to Freedom reveals the stories of women, mostly who escaped, and some who did not. All are quiet heroes whose stories should not be lost to history. Along the Road to Freedom creates a Memory mosaic of the specific women featured in the paintings and asks us all—not just Mennonites of European heritage, recently arrived or long in this land, to remember and honour our/their own stories, especially those of the women, strong or frail, certain or unsure, forging ahead or struggling to survive, who are responsible for our living good lives at peace, far from lands and times of uncertainty and fear.

# Along the Road to Freedom

tells the stories of mothers, daughters, grandmothers and sisters who led their families out of persecution and suffering to lives of freedom and peace

For more information or to book the exhibition into your venue, contact Ray Dirks, artist and curator, at rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca





Judith Dyck Epp

Personal Personal State of the State of State of

As a Principal Section of the Control of the Contro

Tons or spins Na sons more teger on national

But a growth or top think and produce in our percent text to Change to the last their in our

To make the second property of

to the Especial Common of the which is assets or taken for the acting days, store and tester for acting days, store and tester for acting to assets to the Especial common to assets the store and companies. The acting comlines, store for the land more lands, store for the land more lands.





### historical context, personal journeys & a universal message

ntolerable persecution in the 16<sup>th</sup> century caused Anabaptists (Mennonites) mainly from the Netherlands to flee to Poland, settling in areas near Danzig. In the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century many Mennonites began to move to Russia, at the invitation of Tsarina Catherine II. At the start of World War I about 110,000 Mennonites lived in 56 colonies in Russia\*.

The coming of the Russian Revolution in 1917 heralded periods of chaos, persecution and loss. Anarchists caused many deaths during the Civil War that followed. Then came devastating famine and disease. In the 1930s, many men were taken, killed or disappeared into Stalin's Gulag.

Along the Road to Freedom honours Mennonite women — mothers, sisters, daughters, grandmothers, most without men — who found freedom in Canada in the 1920s and in Paraguay and Canada in the 1940s. In the 1920s journeying by train through the Red Gate to Riga, Latvia, from where they continued west by ship. In 1943, in the depths of World War II, 35,000 Mennonites fled Russia in what is called the Great Trek. Only 12,000, ultimately, succeeded in their quest for sanctuary across the Atlantic. Survivors who did not escape were shipped east in boxcars without facilities or food and dumped in the forests of Siberia, left to fend for themselves. Many did not survive.

People who migrated to Canada prior to the Russian Revolution are recognized in the painting of Judith Epp who arrived as a widow in Saskatchewan in the late 1800s. Those who did not get out of Russia are remembered in the painting of Margarita Pankratz.

In the 1920s, many made it out of Russia families intact. In the 1940s many did not. Often only women and children escaped. Sometimes loss was even greater. Katherina Dirks Peters had five children. Three girls died young during the famine and disease infested post-revolutionary times. Her husband disappeared in the 1930s, taken by Stalin's secret police and murdered. She left on the Great Trek with her two sons. She lost both while fleeing. She finally settled in Yarrow, British Columbia, poor and alone.

Katherina lived her remaining years quietly in a tiny, meticulously cared for shack with a beautiful blue plum tree out back. Someone from her church concluded her obituary in 1974, "For many years this beloved sister lived in Yarrow where her loving, peaceful and honest way of life was a blessing to many."

While Along the Road to Freedom includes stories of great loss, persecution and suffering, the stories end, over and over again, with love, kindness, selflessness, faith and, yes, even forgiveness.

Stories like that of Katherina are life lessons for us all.

\*Statistics from Mennonites: A brief history of Witness, Service, Peace by John J. Friesen, 2009

Along the Road to Freedom



Maria Friesen Neufeld

House of the principle.

House one or in Fargura, waste farmed to the fargura of the farmed to the f

the Regions Returning part of the same year. But the court was a service of the court was a final part of the court of the

period filtrate is no more than the distance pulsage one officer in Empire per support of Contage, Oktobage flow on the tome Version Towns Stemanon Towns.

When the Control of t

Minima acade Manas acade de aco Colores maso academ de se acade de ser de la colores de maso de Manas per de ser Manada de Manas Academ de la constitución de Sancia de la constitución de la colores de de la colores de la colores de de la colores de la colores de de la colores de la colores de Colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de la colores de Colores de Colores de Colores de la colores de Colores d



Toro King Guint to day or Konsana, Discours minuted Konsa, ay sorted Discours

Insulvanie Audal William In Malliams In and Andreas In An

§ Borris per lagranda cun communication for the property of the property of the section of the property o

otto pape DWGs to rept nor son Way to Williams. No order for hall all not reference to the paper or national transmit of

Katja Goerz



See - See -

A Committee of the Comm

Katharina Kroeger Neufeld

#### Origins

long the Road to Freedom was initiated by Hans Funk, Wanda Andres, Henry Bergen and Nettie Dueck in late 2008. All four fled the Soviet Union during World War II, arriving in Canada some years later as refugees. Three lost fathers in the 1930s, swept up, as so many were, in Stalin's ruthless, pitiless grasp.

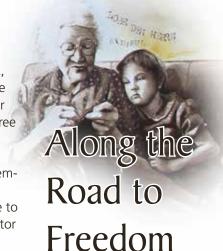
They wished to begin a project that would honour and remember mothers, grandmothers and sisters, like theirs, who had led children safely out of the Soviet Union, through war torn Europe to establishing good lives in Canada. They asked MHC Gallery curator Ray Dirks if he could help. After many meetings and discussions, Along the Road to Freedom came into being.

It was decided that Along the Road to Freedom would centre on a collection of sponsored paintings by Dirks. For the most part,

the paintings are sponsored by families. From one couple to many people from an extended family eventually sponsored 23 paintings to feature a woman or women from their families. The Mennonite Central Committee sponsored a painting to focus on their work in helping people first survive, after the Russian Revolution, and then to find refuge in North or South America. The Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine (FOMCU) sponsored a painting about Margarita Pankratz, one of the many thousands who did not escape. Another painting features the work of the Mennonite Benevolent Society and Kingdom

dres, Nettie Dueck, Hans Funk

Ventures who, like FOMCU, have gone back to former Mennonite areas to help. As Rudy Friesen of FOMCU writes about the work of Mennonites returning to the land of their forebears, "... they have come as friends, scholars and builders to help reconstruct the damage done. These are the Mennonites whose parents, grandparents, relatives and friends once lived in that area. They are coming now neither to glorify nor mourn the past nor to reclaim what once they owned, but in a spirit of mutual embrace. These re-builders resonate with the heart of Menno Simons ..."





Along the Road to Freedom committee members, left to right, Henry Bergen, Ray Dirks, Wanda An-





Katherina Dirks Peters



Helena Niebuhr Loewen



Anna Goosen Giesbrecht

#### **Process**

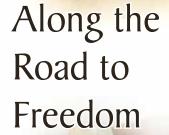
fter a painting was sponsored, Dirks met with family members to talk about the subject, to collect old photos, diary entries, notes and documents, stories. He asked for songs, poems, Bible verses which were important to the women. Many tears were shed as people who were refugee children several decades ago, recounted their journeys to freedom, led by mothers, sisters, grandmothers.

Dirks, then, came up with a sketch and forwarded it to the family. Once both the family and Dirks were satisfied with the sketch, he created the final drawing and finished the painting. Then, he added story/biographical text along the right side of the painting.

Dirks concentrated on historical accuracy as best he could. He worked from family photos when possible but often had to work from memories — visual documentation from the 1920s through 1940s was not always easily available. It is important that the paintings memorialize the women, capture their spirit, and it is, also, important that they are historically accurate.

Early responses to the paintings, from people who have lived the stories to people from other than Mennonite communities, has been highly favourable and, to those who remember their own refugee stories, laced with emotion.

Their stories, your stories, all need to be remembered.





Susanne Loewen Bergen



Helena Niebuhr Loewen



Katharina Klassen Dyck/Anne Dyck Friesen

#### details

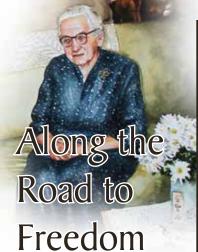
- the exhibition is available for touring in 2015 and onwards
- hosting venues need not have a proper gallery space but they must accept responsibility for security and proper hanging and handling of the art before reserving a tour place
- hosting institutions and organizations are responsible for any and all damage to the art while in their possession
- artworks must never be hung in direct sunlight under any circumstances
- each painting is 49" x 30" (125cm x 76cm), including abbreviated, accompanying story within the same frame (longer versions of each story are included in printed handouts/booklets for use in the gallery)
- each didactic panel is 19 ½" x 31" (50cm X 79cm)
- the exhibit comes in two crates, 26 paintings in protective bags and 7 didactic panels included, #1, 30" wide x 58" long x 48 3/4" high (76 cm x 147 cm X 124 cm), #2, 30" wide x 58" long x 40 1/2" high (76 cm x 147 cm x 103 cm)\*
- hanging instructions are included in the crates
- hosting venues are responsible for organizing shipping to the next stop unless other arrangements are made with Ray Dirks
- a coffee table book and prints of paintings will become available
- Dirks is willing to attend openings, deliver talks and give presentations to any interested group or institution, including primary and secondary schools, universities, churches, historical societies
- \* The print version of the exhibition which will be available to tour in Europe will include full size prints, the panels and come in a smaller, lighter container (to be determined) to cut shipping costs and complications

#### contact

Ray Dirks, curator/artist MHC Gallery 600 Shaftesbury Blvd. Winnipeg, MB Canada R3P 0M4 204 888 6781, extension 196 rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

or Connie Wiebe at 204 888 6781, extension 194 cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca

Along the Road to Freedom is a project of the MHC (Mennonite Heritage Centre) Gallery. The MHC Gallery is a self-funded program of Mennonite Church Canada located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The MHC Gallery is a registered charitable organization in Canada. Along the Road to Freedom paintings are sponsored by over 100 families and family members, the Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the Mennonite Benevolent Society and Kingdom Ventures.





Anna Janzen Koop



Ilse Funk



Suzanne Falk Unger

#### Ray Dirks, artist/curator

Ray Dirks founded the MHC Gallery as a fulltime exhibition venue and became its first curator/director in 1998, after working for more than a decade as a Winnipeg based freelance artist and curator of exhibitions of contemporary African art. Prior to that, he and his wife lived for two years

in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo — where Dirks worked as an illustrator — and Sherbrooke, Quebec for a year. He grew up near Vancouver, British Columbia. Post high school studies included Vancouver Community College's Art in Merchandising program. Dirks curated exhibitions have toured in Europe, Africa and North America. Exhibition stops have included The Canadian Museum of Civilization (now History) in Gatineau, Quebec, Harbourfront in Toronto, the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton, the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg and the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. His original paintings have sold as far away as South Africa. He has

## Along the Road to Freedom

exhibited as a solo artist in Canada, the US, Cuba, Ethiopia, India and Trinidad and Tobago. In 2000 he was invited by the National Union of Writers and Artists in Cuba to have a solo exhibition in Havana. In 2002, Dirks was invited to be artist-in-residence at OMSC, adjacent to Yale University in

New Haven, Connecticut, and a Research Fellow at Yale. During that time, he had a solo exhibition at Yale. He has worked as an artist and curator in 30 countries. He is currently working on an exhibition project based in an indigenous community in Guerrero State, Mexico with Canadian NGO Atzin, Mexican artist Alejandro Aranda and women weavers from the community, Tlamacazapa.

In 2008 Dirks received the Above and Beyond for the Arts award from the Manitoba Foundation for the Arts. In 2011 he received Canadian Mennonite University's Blazer Distinguished Community Service Award.

#### Past endorsements

"This award (Above and Beyond Award for the Arts) is so richly deserved, and I continue to observe what a special and important contribution you make to our community through your work at the gallery and through that link with so many communities within our city." Marlene Neustaedter, past executive director, Manitoba Arts Council, April 30, 2008

"The Provincial Museum of Alberta (now Royal Alberta Museum) has been the fortunate recipient of three marvelous touring exhibitions that have been curated by Ray Dirks. While each one has its own distinct focus, they share the trademark of a project developed by Ray — beautifully presented, superbly eclectic, honest and unfailingly challenging." Tim Willis, Assistant Director, Provincial Museum of Alberta, Edmonton, AB; March 30, 2004

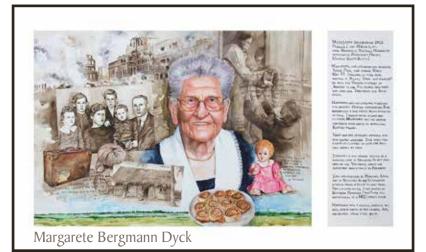
"... Africans are depicted in their individuality, not as stereotypes; in their connectedness in society and in faith, not as tribal cameos; as resolute and committed persons, not as sideshow freaks. We admire without patronizing; we come respectfully to the figures as bearers of life, wisdom, hope, and dignity, rather than going to them condescendingly as exotic colorful relics left over from a remote and savage past. Prejudice has little room in the paintings." Dr. Lamin Sanneh, Yale University, in a review of Dirks' Yale exhibition published in Prism, December 2002



Maria Redekop Wall

Makes, Washers are now Argun to Committee of the Committe





ING AND WERE FORCED ABRAM, HIS FATHER AND Y MEMBERS OVER EIGHTEEN YE KILLED, LEAVING ANNA A WIT CHILDREN. THAlong the Road to RNEY INCLUDED TEN DAYS ON A TRAIN BEFORE LEAVING THE OTH BEHIND. EVENTUALLY SHE SET M IN GLENLEA, MANITOBA TO SURVIVE WAS INTENSE. A TOWER OF STRENGTH ER CHILDREN AND HER CHURC BUT FOR MANY OTHERS WHOSE LIVES SHE TOUCHED. SHE WAS GREATLY LOVED.

Anna lived a life of love, forgiveness, and inspiring faith that the Lord God is the Father of the widow and orbians.



Katarina Penner Froese





