

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 1/2" x 31" (50cm x 79cm) each

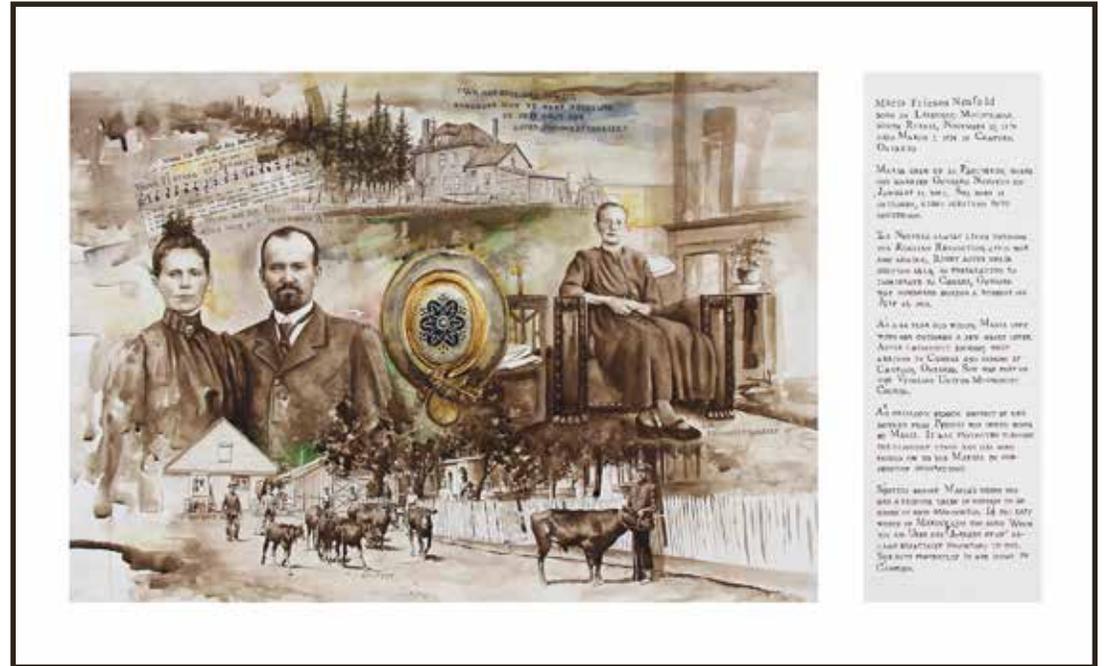
available for touring in North America, mid-2015 onwards  
print version available for touring in Europe, mid-2015 onwards

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 Men-  
nonite Centre in Ukraine, Mennonite Benevolent Society



Maria Elisabeth Nienfeld  
born in Lützenau, Mecklenburg,  
immigrated to Canada in 1874  
and lived in Canada  
Ontario

Maria was the first woman  
to receive the Order of the  
Imperial Crown in Canada,  
Ontario, for her services  
to the community.

The Mennonite church in  
Canada was founded in 1874  
by the first Mennonite  
settlers in Canada, Ontario,  
for their services to the  
community.

As a result of her work,  
Maria was honored with  
the Order of the Imperial  
Crown in Canada, Ontario,  
for her services to the  
community.

An excellent example of  
the work of the Mennonite  
Church in Canada, Ontario,  
for her services to the  
community.

Special thanks to Maria  
for her work in Canada,  
Ontario, for her services  
to the community.

# Along the Road to Freedom

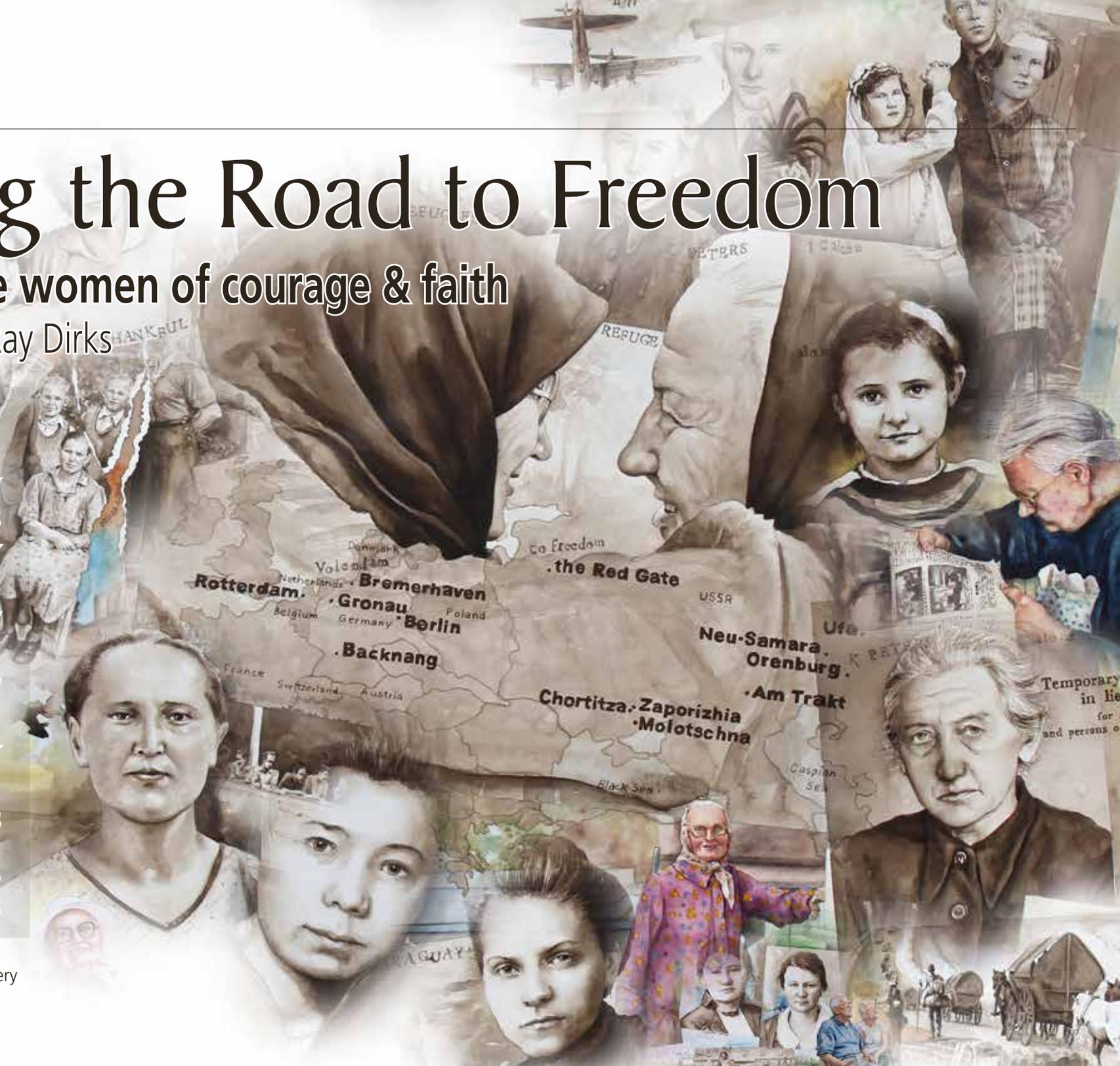
**Mennonite women of courage & faith**

paintings by Ray Dirks

art  
stories  
tragedy  
human rights  
dignity  
strength  
vulnerability  
loss  
honour  
love  
family  
faith  
even forgiveness

26 paintings  
7 didactic panels

a project of the MHC Gallery



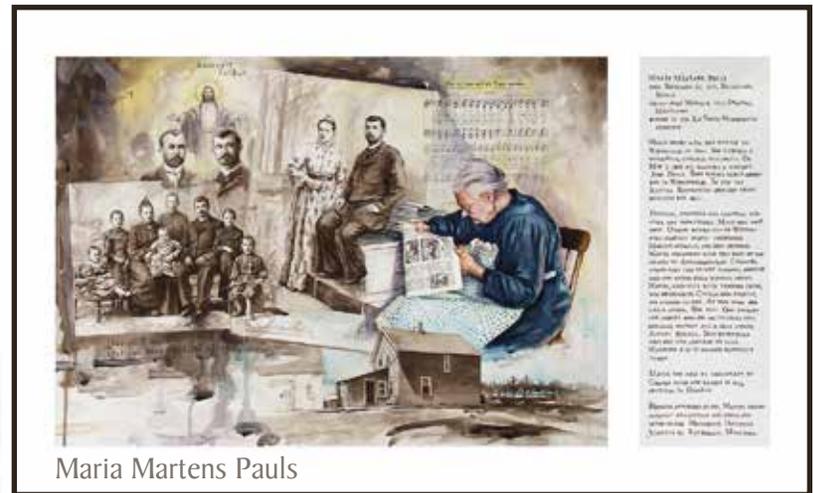
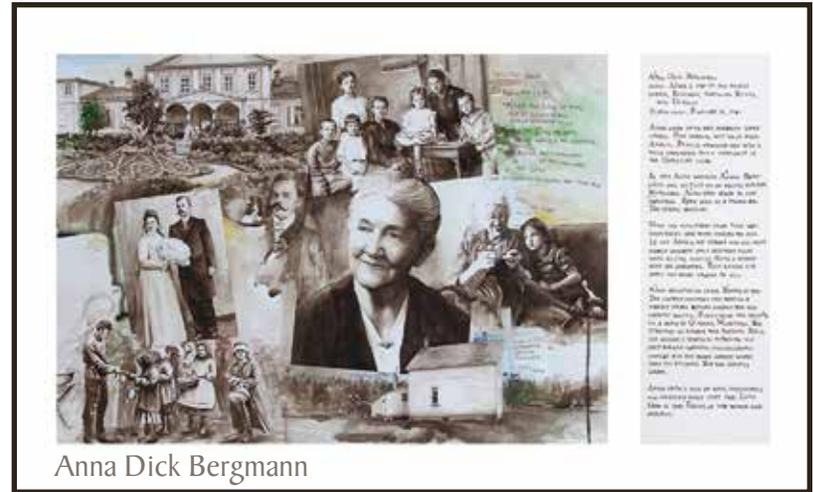
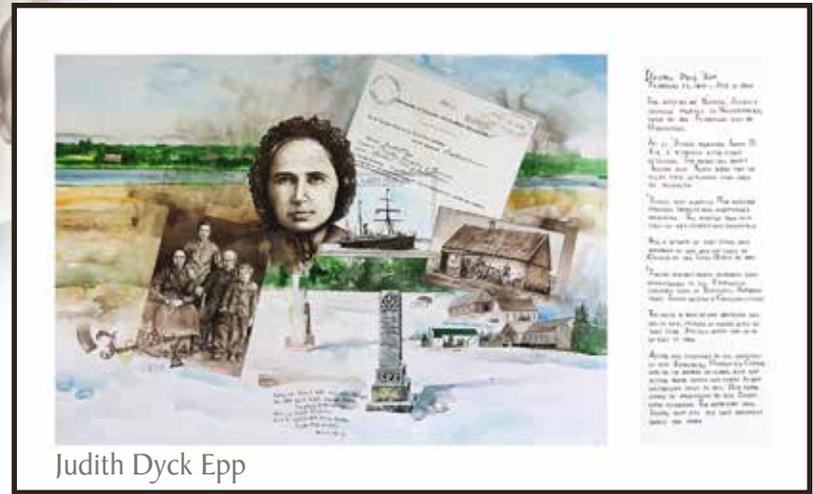
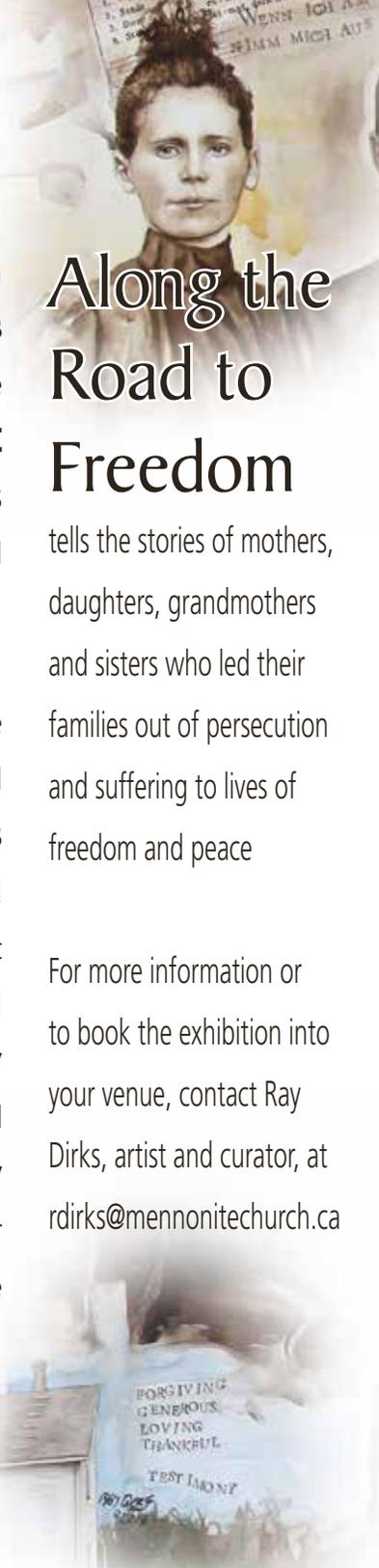
Many Mennonites living in Russia **left, fled,** attempted to flee, **led by women,** even girls, often **without men, the chaos** in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and **the horrors** of Stalin's **persecution** that followed. Many were part of the Great Trek in 1943 which, **in the midst of 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](mailto:rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca)





# Origins

**A**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.

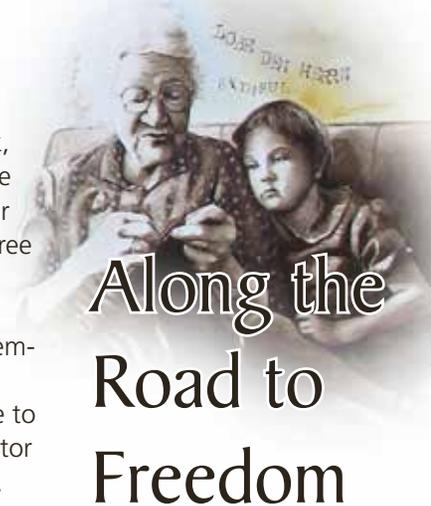
They wished to begin a project that would honour and remember mothers, grandmothers and sisters, like theirs, who had led children safely out of the Soviet Union, through war torn Europe to establishing good lives in Canada. They asked MHC Gallery curator Ray Dirks if he could help. After many meetings 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 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 Andres, Nettie Dueck, Hans Funk**



Katherina Dirks Peters



Helena Niebuhr Loewen



Anna Goosen Giesbrecht



# Process

After 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.

# Along the Road to Freedom



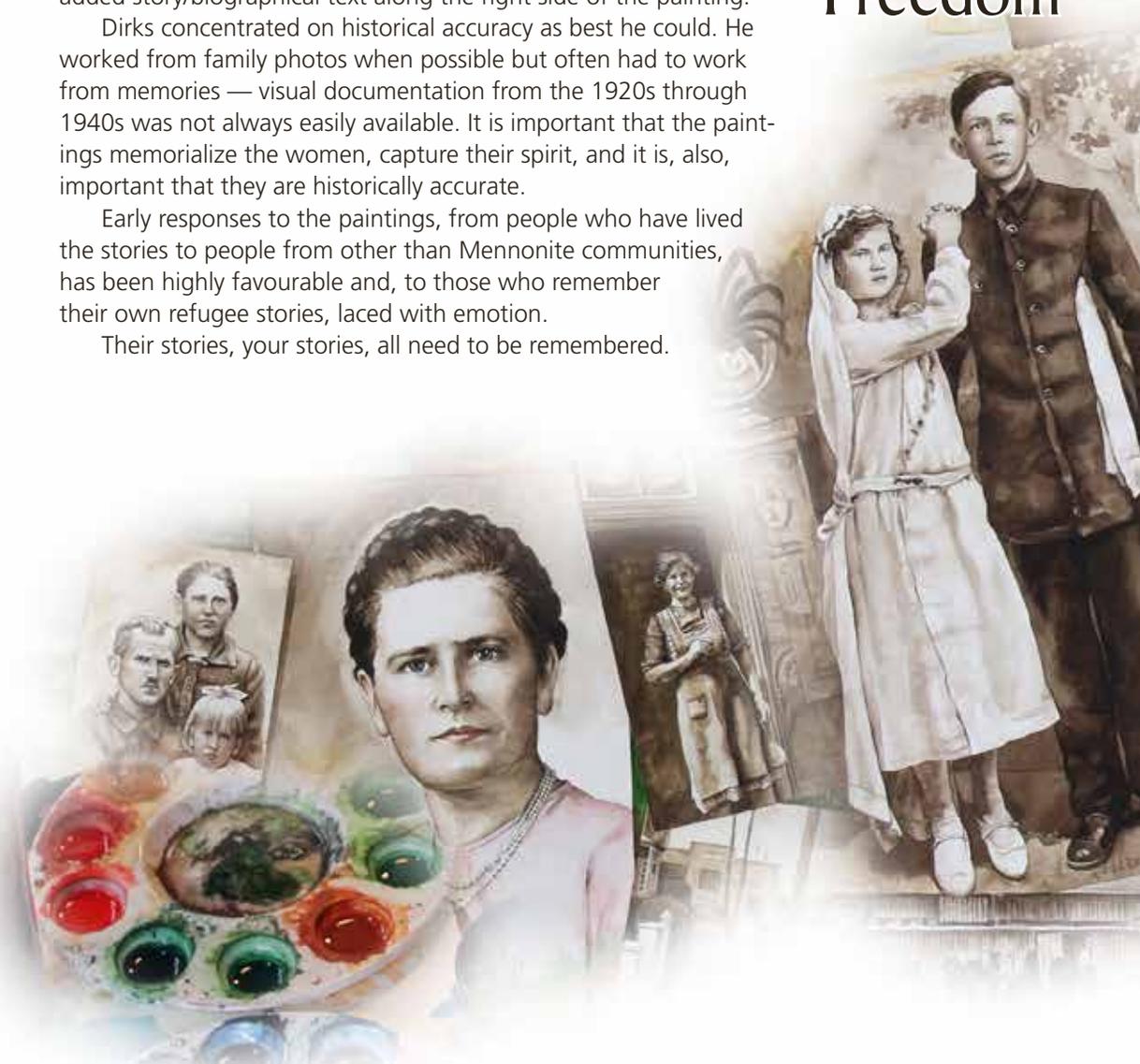
Susanne Loewen Bergen



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 1/2" 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

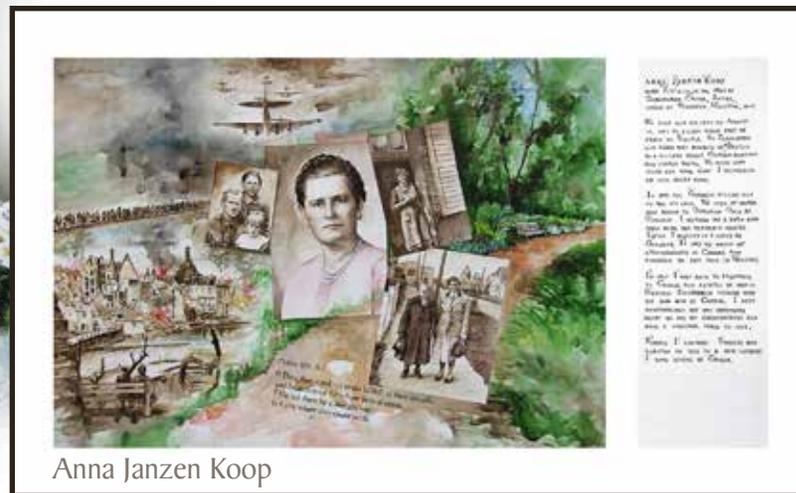
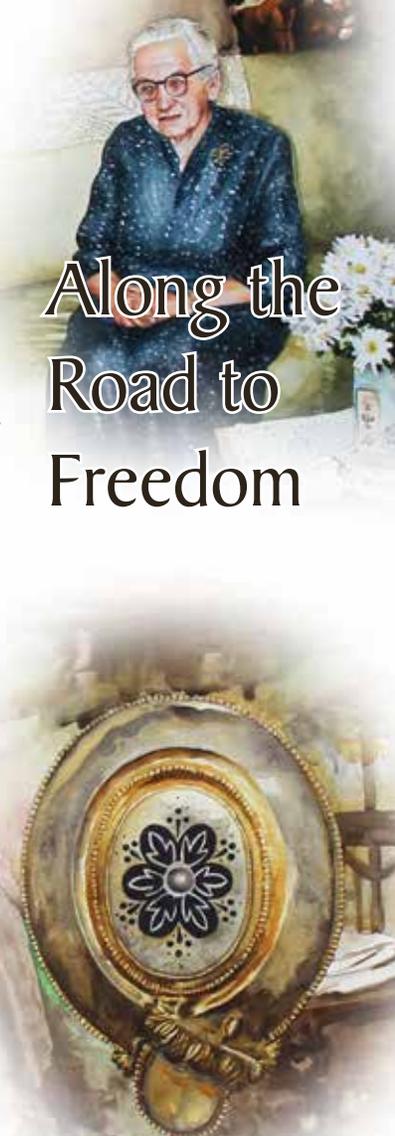
\* The print version of the exhibition which will be available to tour in Europe will include full size prints, the panels and come in a smaller, lighter container (to be determined) to cut shipping costs and complications

# 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

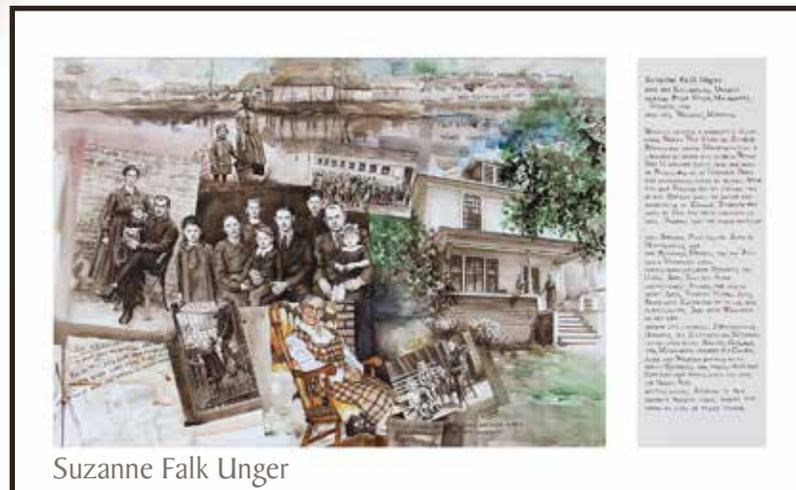
*Along the Road to Freedom* is a project of the MHC (Mennonite Heritage Centre) Gallery. The MHC Gallery is a self-funded program of Mennonite Church Canada located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The MHC Gallery is a registered charitable organization in 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 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



# Along the Road to Freedom

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*



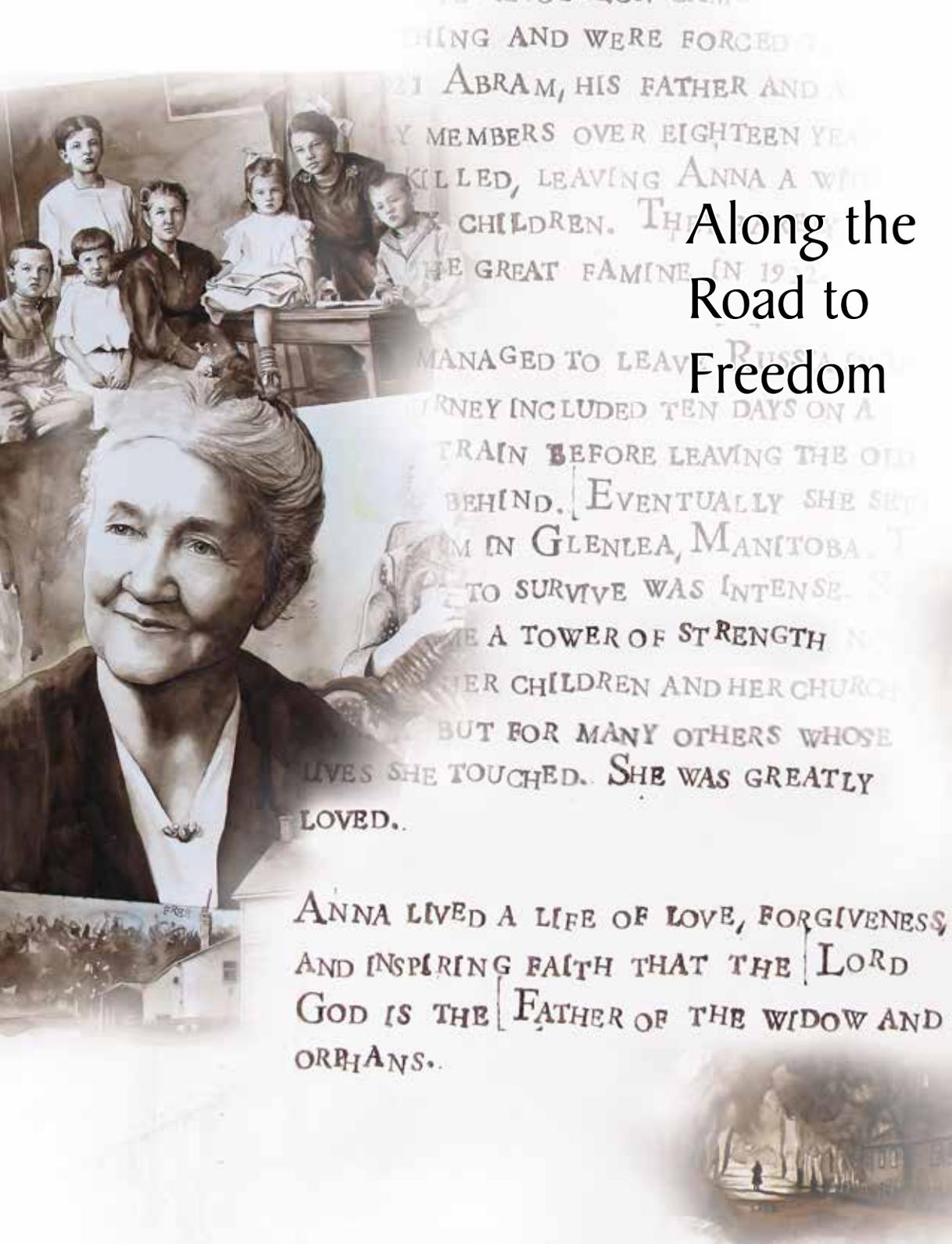
Maria Redekop Wall



Agatha Harms Reimer



Margarete Bergmann Dyck

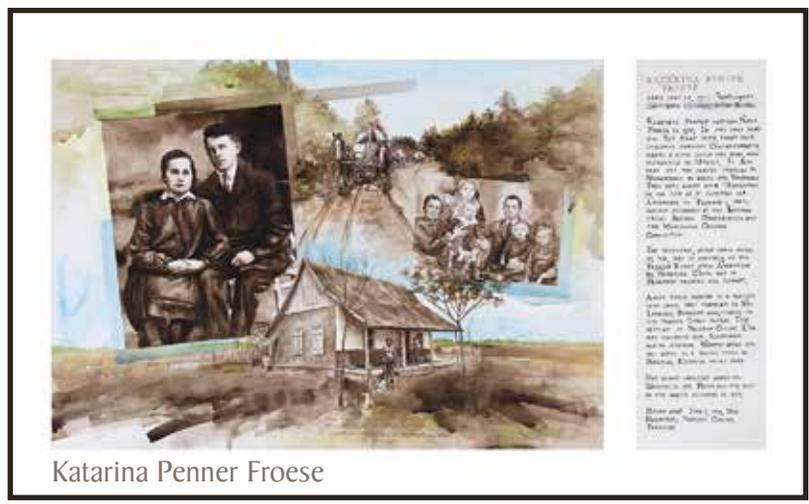


...THING AND WERE FORCED TO  
 ...BY ABRAM, HIS FATHER AND  
 ...Y MEMBERS OVER EIGHTEEN YEARS  
 ...KILLED, LEAVING ANNA A WIDOW  
 ...CHILDREN. THE

# Along the Road to Freedom

...MANAGED TO LEAVE RUSSIA  
 ...JOURNEY INCLUDED TEN DAYS ON A  
 ...TRAIN BEFORE LEAVING THE OLD  
 ...BEHIND. EVENTUALLY SHE SET  
 ...M IN GLENLEA, MANITOBA. THE  
 ...TO SURVIVE WAS INTENSE. SHE  
 ...A TOWER OF STRENGTH NOT  
 ...HER CHILDREN AND HER CHURCH  
 ...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  
 ORPHANS.



Katarina Penner Froese



Mennonite Central Committee



Margarita Pankratz