

Photography Exhibition Focuses on Hopes for Peace in the Middle East

The Riffe Gallery will present *Aspirations: Toward a Future in the Middle East*, January 25 - April 8, an exhibition of more than 170 images by 11 Israeli and Palestinian photographers. *Aspirations* seeks to address a goal that seems impossible and inevitable at the same time—peace in the Middle East between the Israeli and Palestinian people. Artists in the exhibition have been chosen for their ability to convey a sense of self, place and community. The exhibition is curated by Robert Stearns, senior program director, Arts Midwest and Nella Cassouto, independent curator, Jerusalem.

There will be an opening reception on Thursday, January 25, from 5-7 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

Aspirations is produced by the Ohio Arts Council's International Program in partnership with Arts Midwest and with the support of the Illinois Arts Council and the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cultural and Scientific Relations Department and Office of Cultural Affairs in the United States, Consulate General of Israel, New York.

"The issues at the heart of this exhibition concern everyone, no matter where we live," said Wayne Lawson, executive director of the Ohio Arts Council. "For that reason, we were inspired to assemble an exhibition of diverse viewpoints from the Middle East and to share it with audiences in North and South America. We hope it will encourage dialogue among many different cultures about a situation that will continue to evolve over time and affect our lives for years to come."

Israeli and Palestinian cultures are like geologic plates painfully grinding against each other. But politics, compounded by religious division, camouflages common bonds of social and economic interdependence that can drive the peace process, the curators say.

Images in this exhibition convey the realities and aspirations of the photographers. The artists certainly desire peace, but in the face of the perpetual disappointments of the past, they view their world with a combination of optimism, skepticism and irony.

Aspirations focuses on the medium of photography because it is available to artists of many different backgrounds. It also is adaptable to different artistic attitudes from the abstract and conceptual to the politically motivated and photo-journalistic. And for viewers, it provides a common ground from which to grasp these artists' widely differing messages.

Only artists from Israel and the Palestine territories were chosen because their confrontations are well known and closely watched around the world. Artists

who created images that are both personally relevant and universally recognizable were chosen for the exhibition. As a result, these photographs reflect many aspects of everyday reality in the region at the beginning of the 21st century.

Artists represented in the exhibition include Issa Freij, Amit Geron, Yehoshua Glotman, Noel Jabbour, Adi Nes, Naomi Tereza Salmon, Tamir Sher, Osama Silwadi, Sharon Ya'ari, Lee Yanor and Khaled Zighari.

Two special events will take place in the gallery during the exhibition. On Sunday, January 28 at 2 p.m. *Aspirations* co-curator, Nella Cassouto, will share her personal insights about the artists and their work. On Sunday, March 4 at 2 p.m. *Aspirations* co-curator Robert Stearns and mediation specialist Patricia Williams will discuss the making of this exhibition and the power of communities around the globe.

A full-color catalog of the exhibition will be available for \$10.

Aspirations: Toward a Future in the Middle East will travel in Latin America to Buenos Aires, Argentina; Santiago, Chile; Havana, Cuba; and Monterrey, Mexico; and will continue its United States tour beginning in Chicago in mid-2002.

The exhibition is supported by the Ohio Building Authority. Media sponsors include Columbus Alive, Small Business News, Time Warner Communications and WWCD/CD101.

In 1996 Israel and the State of Ohio signed a cultural exchange agreement to facilitate exchange opportunities in the arts, education and humanities. The agreement opened the door for artist and exhibition exchanges between Ohio and Israel. *Common Ground: Contemporary Landscapes from Israel and Ohio* was the first exhibition to take place under the agreement.

The Riffe Gallery, operated by the Ohio Arts Council, showcases the work of Ohio's artists and curators and the collections of the state's museums and galleries. The gallery is in the Vern Riffe Center for Government and the Arts, State and High Streets, Columbus, OH. Hours are Monday and Tuesday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 10 a.m.-8:00 p.m., Saturday 12-8 p.m. and Sunday 12-4 p.m. Admission is free. For information or to schedule a tour call the Riffe Gallery at 614/644-9624.

Working with national corporations, philanthropic and arts organizations, the Ohio Arts Council's International Program is recognized as a leader in cultural arts exchanges among U.S. state arts agencies. Designed to foster long-term involvement in international cultural exchanges, the International Program encourages Ohio artists and arts organizations to form partnerships with arts professionals abroad. The International Program provides grants to help nonprofit educational, cultural and arts organizations, individual artists,

performers, educators, arts managers and administrators develop exemplary international arts projects and innovative partnerships that increase Ohioans' access to international arts activities.

The Ohio Arts Council, a state agency established in 1965, builds the state through the arts-economically, educationally and culturally-preserving the past, enhancing the present and enriching the future for all Ohioans. The Council believes the people of Ohio should share the arts. The arts arise from public, individual and organizational efforts. The OAC supports and encourages those efforts. .

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