Welcoming the Stranger: Building Understanding Through Community-based Art

A multi-media exhibition by Jo Israelson

September 14-October 30, 2016

The Bible, the Qur’an and Hebrew Scriptures each include the story of Abraham welcoming three strangers into his home for a meal and hospitality. “Abraham’s Tent,” a 50-foot-long canopy constructed with cloth woven at a variety of community events, will be the focus of the exhibition in the atrium of Guilford’s Hege Library, and will incorporate fabric created at the National Folk Festival in Greensboro a few days before the exhibition opens.

“When diverse people come together to weave a piece, they create an object of beauty and one fabric that is stronger than its individual strands,” Israelson says.

An opening reception will be held 5:30-7 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 14. Israelson will speak at the reception about how her project developed and her goals for engaging the community around the theme of immigration.

Both the exhibition – the Southern debut for the art – and reception are free and open to the public. Hege Library is open 8 a.m.-midnight Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday and noon-midnight Sunday. The library will be closed Oct. 8-9 and 15-16 for Guilford’s Fall Break.

Inspired by the parable of Abraham’s hospitality, Israelson started inviting people to contribute to her “Welcoming the Stranger” installation in 2015. She has used the project to encourage collaboration among artists, writers, museums and immigrant organizations in order to bring attention to the immigrant experience, past and present.

On Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 10 and 11, Israelson will be in the National Folk Festival’s N.C. Folklife area at Greene Street and February One Place in downtown Greensboro. She will work with community members to Weave the Tent, creating pieces of cloth that she will integrate into Welcoming the Stranger.

#Weavethetent is co-sponsored by Fabric of Freedom, a series of arts programs celebrating the diversity and cultural history of Greensboro, host city for the National Folk Festival (2015-17).

Funded by an Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fabric of Freedom series is presented by ArtsGreensboro and co-sponsored by the AJ Fletcher Foundation and Lincoln Financial Foundation. For a full list of events, visit the Fabric of Freedom page on the National Folk Festival website.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Art Gallery, FaithAction International House and New Garden Friends Meeting are co-sponsoring a Stranger to Neighbor Dialogue at 6 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 22. The program will begin with a tour of the “Welcoming the Stranger” exhibit, and then guests will walk across the street to the New Garden Friends Meeting House, where dinner will be served.

Participants will hear about the history and impact of FaithAction’s ID Card Initiative from a member of local law enforcement, an immigrant who has benefited from the ID card and a staff member of Faith Action International. Following the panel, small groups will discuss the program and share personal stories, concluding with larger group reflections.

The Stranger to Neighbor program and dinner are free, but space is limited and a reservation is required. Reserve a space for the Sept. 22 program via Eventbrite.

For additional information about the exhibition and related events, please contact Art Gallery Founding Director and Curator Terry Hammond ’81 at 336-316-2438 or thammond@guilford.edu.